

INSPECTION REPORT

Churchdown School

Churchdown, Gloucester

LEA area: Gloucestershire

Unique reference number: 115760

Headteacher: Mr Simon Packer

Reporting inspector: Michael Newton
2494

Dates of inspection: 22 - 26th January 2001

Inspection number: 188621

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

© Crown copyright 2001

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

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Winston Road Churchdown Gloucester Gloucestershire
Postcode:	GL3 2RB
Telephone number:	01452 713340
Fax number:	01452 857367
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Wing Commander Chris Rackham
Date of previous inspection:	April 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
2494	M Newton	<i>Registered inspector</i>	Special educational needs; Equal opportunity.	Leadership and Management
9121	H Danpure	<i>Lay inspector</i>		Attitudes, Care and Parental links.
12475	S Johnson	<i>Team inspector</i>	Music.	
1578	M Sinclair	<i>Team inspector</i>	Religious education.	
18888	J Boulton	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Physical education.	
8806	M Flatman	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Vocational education.	
19499	B Baughan	<i>Team Inspector</i>	English.	
18261	A Hill	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Art.	
78784	M King	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Science.	
15396	R Bulman	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Modern foreign languages.	Curriculum
20247	R Parry	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Geography.	
20243	D Benstock	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Science.	Standards in Teaching.
2739	I Benson	<i>Team Inspector</i>	History	
1990	G Preston	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Design and technology.	Sixth Form
3753	H Wilkie	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Mathematics.	
18638	C Shaw	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Information and communication technology.	

The inspection contractor was:

*Westminster Education Consultants
Old Garden House
The Lanterns,
Bridge Lane
LONDON
SW11 3AD*

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

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

REPORT CONTENTS	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	1
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
 PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	6
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?	10
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS?	12
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	15
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?	17
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	18
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	22
 PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	 23
 PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	 29

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Churchdown is a large mixed comprehensive school of 1361 pupils. Until 1999 it was Grant Maintained and is now a Foundation School. It has increased in size by 200 since the last inspection and is currently oversubscribed. The school is situated in a large village to the north of Gloucester and serves a wide catchment area. Over half of the pupils live in Gloucester itself and many are drawn from villages to the west between Gloucester and Tewkesbury. Nearly all the pupils are white and come from a wide range of social backgrounds. The number of pupils eligible for free school meals (8.3 per cent) is well below the national average (17.8 per cent). The number of pupils with statements of special educational need (26) is broadly in line with the national average (2.5 per cent). However, attainment on entry is below the national average as reflected in National Curriculum tests taken by pupils in the last year of the primary school. Standardised tests indicate that an increasing proportion of pupils are entering the school with low verbal reasoning skills. This is reflected in the significant number with poor literacy skills. The number of pupils currently on the special needs register is broadly average but this does not yet take account of the needs of all current Year 7 pupils. Higher-attaining pupils are not so well represented in the school due to a selective system available in the area.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Churchdown is an effective school. The headteacher, who has been appointed since the last inspection, has established a broader leadership team who have successfully brought about improvement in their respective areas of responsibility. There has been a collective focus on improving the quality of teaching, which is now consistently good. The school has retained a strong commitment to inclusion and meeting the needs of individuals. As a result, standards are improving and those seen in the classroom during inspection are generally higher than those reflected in the most recent test and examination results. Pupils enter the school with standards below the national average and, by the age 16, GCSE results are overall above the national average. Progress at Key Stage 4 is greater than at Key Stage 3, where the school has not yet successfully addressed the increasing numbers entering the school with low levels of literacy. Also, the successful monitoring of pupils' progress at Key Stage 4 is at an early stage of development lower down the school. The Sixth Form is developing well and is cost effective. Financial planning is good, focusing on improvement, and as a result the school provides good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Successfully focuses on the personal development of the whole child;
- has consistently high quality teaching;
- develops very good relationships that make a significant contribution to the quality of provision;
- its leadership and management focuses on improvement and achieving the school's aims;
- provides a very rich programme of extra curricular activities;
- makes very good use of the resources in the community.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- examination and test results at each stage and particularly at the end of Key Stage 3;
- literacy, particularly in the early years;
- the range of teaching materials and strategies to support pupils of all abilities;
- the use of data at departmental and classroom level to inform planning, monitor achievement and set targets for pupils.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in April 1996 and the governors drew up an action plan based on the key issues identified in that report. Following the appointment of the present headteacher, the school focused on improving the quality of teaching. At the last inspection, nearly one in five lessons were unsatisfactory with wide variations between subjects. In history and geography it was unsatisfactory. Teaching is now consistently good across the school and the situation in history and geography has been reversed with the appointment of two new heads of department. The headteacher also changed the management structure to enable better monitoring of both teaching and the implementation of policies. These developments, together with positive action to address a wide range of issues identified in the last report, has meant that improvement is evident across the school and the prospect of further improvement is secure.

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				<i>Key</i>
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	C	B	C	C	<i>well above average</i> A <i>above average</i> B <i>average</i> C <i>below average</i> D <i>well below average</i> E
A-Levels/AS-Levels	E	C	C	N/A	

Most pupils' level of attainment on entry to the school is below that expected nationally. By the age of 16, pupils' attainment is overall above the national average, as reflected in both recent GCSE results and in the standards of work seen in the classroom during the inspection. However, progress is greater at Key Stage 4 where there has been a sharper focus on raising achievement by, for example, monitoring pupils' progress and setting individual targets. At Key Stage 3, although pupils achieve well in most subjects in relation to their prior

attainment, results in the core subjects in national tests remain below average. Inspection evidence indicates that standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are close to national expectations in most subjects, but not in English and science where achievement is not as great as it should be. In general, the school has not yet successfully addressed the issue of low literacy skills on entry and this is limiting progress at Key Stage 3. Results in the Sixth Form, although below the national average, are improving and pupils make good progress. Because of the context in which the school operates and the skewed nature of the ability profile of pupils on entry, comparisons with similar schools is not straightforward. Overall the school achieves as well as similar schools. It continues to improve and, for 2001, has set a realistic but challenging target of 51 per cent of pupils achieving five or more grades at A*-C in GCSE.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school.	Good. Pupils enjoy lessons and are enthusiastic, hardworking and attentive.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms.	Good. Any poor behaviour is well managed and incidents of bullying are dealt with quickly and effectively. The number of exclusions has been reduced.
Personal development and relationships.	Very good. There is a strong focus on the personal development of the individual.
Attendance.	Good. There is a good follow up to any absence.

These aspects make a significant contribution to the quality of education and the standards achieved. The consistently positive attitudes of pupils, coupled with the good relationships which teachers establish with them, have a beneficial effect on the quality of learning in the classroom. Pastoral staff and teachers generally know pupils well and successfully provide for their personal development.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen: 198	Good	Good	Good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

Teaching is consistently good across all stages and in most subjects. In only five lessons was teaching judged to be unsatisfactory. In over three quarters of lessons it was good or better and in over a third it was very good or excellent. This is a considerable improvement since the last inspection. In English, teaching is better at Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3, where it is satisfactory. The teaching here is not adequately addressing low levels of literacy. The focus on developing literacy skills across the curriculum is generally weak, particularly in Year 7. Teaching in science is satisfactory across Key Stages 3 and 4 with low expectations being the most significant weakness affecting learning. Teaching in mathematics is consistently good. The teaching and reinforcement of

number skills is generally satisfactory across the curriculum. Learning is also good overall, although the percentage of lessons where learning is judged to be very good or excellent is not as high at Key Stage 3 as elsewhere. Pupils with special educational needs have very good teaching when withdrawn from classes for intensive learning. They also get good support from learning support assistants, when this is available. Their learning is generally good though they, with others of lower ability, do not always receive work which is suitably adapted to meet their needs.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school provides a good, mainly broad and balanced curriculum at all stages. Careers and Personal health and social education are very good as, too, is the contribution from the community.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The learning support department gives very good support to those who qualify for it. Provision for others is more limited.
Provision for pupils' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	This is good overall. Good provision is made for moral, social and cultural development. There is a whole range of curricular and extra curricular activities. Satisfactory provision for spiritual development is made, with a good contribution from religious studies.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very well. The level of support and guidance they receive, as well as the monitoring of their personal development, is very good.

The school has a caring and supportive ethos that is valued by both parents and pupils. The curriculum is regularly reviewed in an effort to meet the needs of pupils. It meets statutory requirements except that there is no religious education in the Sixth Form. Some subjects such as design and technology and religious education have difficulty meeting requirements because of a lack of time, and others such as mathematics, design and technology and music lack access to information and communication technology resources. Very good use is made of community resources in the form of visits and visiting speakers to enhance and enliven the curriculum. The school seeks to involve parents and is increasingly successful in doing so.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good across all areas of the school. The headteacher gives a clear lead in pursuit of improvement. The leadership group works well as a team and monitors the work of the school well.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors have a good understanding of the school. Strategic planning is good and the committee structure works well. They meet nearly all their statutory responsibilities.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good overall. Senior staff use data very well to evaluate performance. Its use at departmental level is sometimes lacking in rigour.
The strategic use of resources	Funding is limited and planning for its use is good, focusing on educational priorities identified in the school development plan.

Staffing is generally adequate to meet the needs of the school. There are difficulties recruiting teachers in modern foreign languages. The training and induction of all staff is a strength of the school. Overall accommodation is satisfactory and plans are in hand for further additions and enhancements to meet the needs of a growing school. The adequacy of learning resources is generally good. Leadership and management is effective in focussing on improvement and raising standards. The school applies the principles of best value well.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the school expects pupils to work hard; • their child makes progress at school; • their child likes school; • they feel comfortable about approaching the school; • the teaching is good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the amount of work to be done at home; • to be kept better informed about how their child is getting on; • working more closely with parents.

Inspectors agree that the amount of work to be done at home does vary in both frequency and quality but judge that, overall, homework makes a good contribution to learning. Inspectors believe that the school does all it reasonably can to provide information about how well pupils are getting on and, if there are concerns, teachers are available every Wednesday after school for consultation with parents. Equally, inspectors feel that the school seeks to work closely with its parents.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Most pupils' level of attainment on entry to the school is below that expected nationally, as judged by National Curriculum tests taken in Year 6. Additional standardised tests indicate that the verbal reasoning skills of these pupils is below the national average. The school does not have a truly comprehensive intake, mostly because of the selective provision available in the locality. Pupils of higher ability are less well represented than might be true nationally. Data also shows that the proportion of pupils entering the school in the lower ranges of ability has increased over recent years.

2. By the age of 14, standards overall in all subjects are close to national expectations. As a result of good teaching, pupils achieve well in most subjects over Years 7 to 9. However, achievement in English and science is not as great as it should be. In recent National Curriculum tests in the core subjects at the end of Year 9, attainment remains below the level expected nationally. The proportion of pupils reaching Level 5, or greater, was well below the national average in English, below average in mathematics but close to the average in science. The proportion reaching higher levels was well below the national average in the three core subjects reflecting the ability profile of the intake. When pupils' levels are converted to points for comparative purposes, their average National Curriculum score was well below the national average in English and below in science and mathematics. When compared with schools with a similar number of pupils eligible for free school meals, performance was very low in all three core subjects. Although comparison with similar schools needs to be treated with caution, in view of the particular profile of the school, results show a decline in performance over the past three years, compared to the national picture, although science has remained relatively constant. The trend in the school's average National Curriculum points score was below the national trend.

3. Pupils with identified special educational needs benefit from the very good support provided by the learning support department and make good progress through Key Stage 3 in relation to their prior attainment. In Year 7, selected pupils are withdrawn from all English lessons for half a term for an intensive programme of language development. This follows in-class support by learning support assistants who help to identify the most needy. Limited resources mean that focussed support comes late in the year for some. Also, those with less severe needs are not as well catered for in lessons as they should be. These factors have a bearing on the slow progress some pupils make in Key Stage 3, particularly in English.

4. Pupils' standards of attainment by the age of 16 is above the national average, overall. Since the last inspection, GCSE results have risen steadily until last year when there was a dip. The proportion of pupils obtaining five or more grades A* to G rose from 92 per cent to more than 96 per cent between 1997 and 1999, falling again to 92 per cent in 2000. This is above, but close, to the national average. The proportion of pupils obtaining five or more higher grades A* to C rose from 48 per cent in 1997 to 51 per cent in 1999, falling again to 48 per cent in 2000. This fell short of the school's target of 51 per cent. Again, the 2000 figures are above but close to the national

average. Viewed over a three-year period these results are above the national average. Improvement is further reflected in the average point score per pupil that has risen from 35.5 to nearly 40 in 1999, but reducing to 36.6 in the 2000 results. Over a three year period this figure is close to the national average even though a significant proportion of pupils of lower ability sit alternative examinations to GCSE and some follow a more appropriate curriculum with a reduced examination load. These factors depress this performance measure. The dip in the 2000 results is attributed to a small number of boys who failed to reach their potential.

5. Pupils achieve well, over Years 10 and 11, in many subjects, and satisfactorily in English, modern languages and history. Progress is reflected in the examination results in 2000, where the percentage of pupils gaining grades A* to C in the core subjects was close to the national average in science and English, but below in mathematics. It was above average in art, music and design and technology, drama, English literature and information technology. Results were below average in French, geography, German and physical education. The percentage achieving grades A* to G was above the national average in art, business studies, design and technology, drama, history and information technology, but below average in mathematics and close in all other subjects. Pupils' best results, compared to their achievements in other subjects, were in art, business studies, design and technology, drama, history and information technology. The weakest results were in English, mathematics, science, French, geography, German and physical education.

6. In Years 12 and 13, pupils' standards of attainment at GCE Advanced Level are as expected, in relation to their prior attainment, but overall below the national average. Results in the GNVQ assessments are below the national average. Recent results are a little below the national average based on the average point score of pupils taking two or more GCE or Vocational Advanced Level courses. The performance in art was above average, and that in English, mathematics, science, geography and information technology close to the average. Sixth Form pupils make good progress in most subjects.

7. Inspection evidence indicates that the standards reached by pupils in English at the end of Key Stage 3 reflects the national test results. They improve orally and with their reading but progress with writing is below expectation. Presentation, spelling and punctuation are careless. At Key Stage 4 standards improve in all aspects. Coursework is well presented and clearly structured. A policy of drafting and redrafting has been effective in the progress achieved. Standards of work seen in the Sixth Form reflect the higher examination results attained. Standards in drama are good at the end of Key Stage 3 and pupils are well prepared to move on to GCSE. In work seen at the end of Key Stage 4, in Year 11, standards are above average. Pupils have a good grasp of dramatic technique and produce well-organised and imaginative work.

8. Pupils are achieving well in mathematics. Standards in lessons and written work indicate that they are now achieving better than is apparent in previous tests and examinations. This has been achieved by effective improvement in teaching and further development and implementation of the National Numeracy strategy. By the end of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, standards are close to national expectation. In the Sixth Form,

standards are also close to average. Standards in the manipulation of number are generally lower than in other aspects of the subject. For example, by the end of Key Stage 3, higher attaining pupils can estimate probability confidently, whilst lower attaining pupils have difficulty with decimal addition.

9. From the work seen in science, standards are below the level expected nationally at the end of Key Stage 3. By the age of 14, a small number of higher-attaining pupils have sufficient knowledge and understanding of difficult concepts such as genetics to achieve the highest grades. Lower-attaining pupils struggle with some basic scientific concepts. Pupils often find it difficult to give precise written answers to questions, reflecting weakness in literacy. Most pupils are more successful in investigative activities than they are in tests and examinations. At the end of Key Stage 4, standards of investigation and basic scientific understanding are much more secure, and standards approach the average expected nationally. In Years 12 and 13, the standards that pupils are attaining are in line with course expectations. Although pupils make slow progress up to age 14, their scientific development through the later years is significantly better and, overall, achievement over the whole time in school is satisfactory.

10. Standards attained in lessons by pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 are close to expectation in most other subjects, but good in information and communication technology. They are below average in geography. In most subjects, pupils advance their knowledge and understanding well. At Key Stage 4, attainment is above average in art and design, design and technology and information technology. It is below average in history and modern languages. Pupils progress well over Key Stage 4 in design and technology, art, music, geography and religious education. Evidence indicates that the school's target for 2001 of 51 per cent of pupils achieving five or more A*-C grades at GCSE is both realistic and challenging.

11. Literacy and numeracy standards are generally low on entry to the school. Pupils have limited experience of the formal language they need for success, particularly in the demands it makes on writing skills. As they move through Key Stage 3, they make good progress in reading but less so in writing. Pupils with greatest difficulties are given intensive help by the learning support department, but all pupils have opportunities for improving reading skills in subjects such as English, history, geography and religious education. The English and history departments make good use of the library. Presentation of work is particularly good in science, history and geography, but there is little consistency at present in the way teachers respond to written work and intervene to improve its standard.

12. Numeracy standards are rising slowly as a result of the school's initiatives in mathematics and the benefits of the National Numeracy Strategy. The use of number across the curriculum in subjects such as science, geography, design and technology, personal health and social education and information communication technology, is also helping to raise standards. In the vocational courses, very effective use is made of data-handling and display skills.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

13. Pupils' attitudes to school are good. Most pupils enjoy lessons, are enthusiastic, hardworking and remain attentive throughout lessons. Despite a few parents' concerns about disruptive behaviour in classes, pupils' behaviour in lessons is usually good or very good. Unsatisfactory behaviour was only observed in a very small number of lessons. In most lessons, pupils settle quickly, listen well and carry out their work effectively. They work together well as seen, for example, in a Year 8 dance class where girls collaborated very enthusiastically to produce and perform routines. Similarly, the response of some Year 10 pupils in a non-examination, vocational course was outstanding. There are pupils who present challenging behaviour but this is well managed by teachers; as witnessed in a non-examination vocational course where these pupils responded positively to good teaching.

14. Behaviour around the school, and in the packed dining room, is also predominantly good but there is still some jostling where space is tight. In the early part of the inspection, the weather was bad with little opportunity for outdoor breaks but behaviour did not deteriorate. Overall, pupils are friendly, polite and courteous. Pupils and parents report that any incidents of bullying are dealt with quickly and effectively and no oppressive behaviour was seen during the inspection.

15. Since the last inspection there has been a deliberate policy to reduce exclusions and the efforts of the school to develop inclusive strategies has been recognised by Her Majesty's Inspectors. The number of permanent exclusions is similar to the national average, but the number of fixed-term exclusions is higher than in most schools. However, both have decreased since the last inspection, in relation to the number of pupils on roll.

16. Relationships within the school are very good and have a significant impact on the success of pupils' learning and well-being. The school works as a very effective community that supports all its members. Pupils work well together and respect each other's work. Pupils respond very well to the encouragement and praise they receive from staff. They are confident and willing to ask for help or clarification if they do not understand what they have to do.

17. In response to the good level care they receive, pupils are developing into mature and responsible individuals who are willing to help others. This is illustrated, for example, by the way members of the school council present the views of their year group, in the support given to various charities at home and abroad, and in the pupil-support group which provides refreshments at school events. There is good support for extra-curricular activities. Many pupils work well independently. However, pupils have limited opportunities to show initiative.

18. Attendance remains good, with continuing low levels of unauthorised absence. During the last academic year the attendance was above 90 per cent for Years 7 to 10 but dipped below for Year 11. This was caused by the low attendance of six pupils, two of whom had medical problems. The current Year 11 has a better attendance rate and it is above the 90 per cent. benchmark. Punctuality is also generally good and has improved since the school day started earlier, particularly for those travelling by school bus.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

19. The quality of teaching, and of the learning, is good in all years and it has significantly improved since the last inspection, notably in geography and history. Teaching is at least satisfactory in 97 per cent of lessons seen; good or better in 79 per cent and very good or excellent in 37 per cent. There are examples of some excellent teaching in art, English, history and religious education. Teaching was unsatisfactory in just 5 lessons. There is no significant difference in teaching between each key stage, although learning was slightly weaker in Key Stage 3, where it is affected by low literacy skills.

20. In Years 7 to 9, the quality of teaching and learning is very good in art and design. It is good in mathematics, design and technology, geography, information and communication technology, modern languages, music, physical education and religious education, and it is satisfactory in all other subjects. In Years 10 and 11, the quality of teaching is also very good again in art and design. It is good in all other subjects except science, where it is satisfactory. In Years 12 and 13, the quality of teaching and learning is good overall in A Level lessons. It is very good in art and design, music, geography, and business studies. It is good in English, mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics, design and technology, information and communication technology, history and physical education. In the vocational subject areas, teaching is satisfactory. The good teaching overall has resulted in the good achievement of pupils over their time in the school.

21. Teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of their subjects and as a result are able to convey their enthusiasm and motivate pupils. They also have a thorough knowledge of the requirements of the courses being taught. For example, teachers who teach A Level have a very good command of their subjects. In areas such as art, drama and history, where teaching is predominantly very good, this knowledge leads to very good learning.

22. The management of pupils is a strength of the teaching. Teachers have very good relationships with pupils and there is a good deal of trust between teachers and pupils. Teachers spend a considerable amount of time encouraging pupils to do well, which helps to raise their confidence. Teachers know their pupils well and there is very little evidence of them misbehaving in lessons.

23. The planning of lessons is mainly good. The difference between the satisfactory lessons and those that are better lies mainly in the way lessons are planned and structured to provide a range of tasks that match the needs of all pupils. In the good lessons, clear learning objectives are shared with pupils, and teachers make it clear to them what they should know, understand or be able to do by the end of the lesson. In these lessons pupils concentrate well and want to learn and succeed. Planning is less effective, for example, in some English lessons at Key Stage 3 where activities are less well focused on learning outcomes for individual pupils.

24. Teachers generally have high expectations of their pupils and lessons move at a good pace. Much of the work in most subjects is challenging, and enables pupils to achieve well. In mathematics, for example, teachers expect pupils to tackle sophisticated problems that lead to increasingly higher attainment. Teachers also have high expectations of how pupils should behave. However, in some areas, for example, in science in Key Stage 4, expectations of the standard of work for higher ability pupils are too low.

25. The quality and frequency of marking and on-going assessment vary across and within subjects but they are generally good. In science, the marking of pupils' work is regular, but it is not sufficiently informative for pupils to know their level of attainment, or for them to set targets for improvement. In English, in Key Stage 3, it is inconsistent and, whilst taking account of the need to improve writing skills, often fails to identify weaknesses. By contrast, in art and design, and in information technology, very good practices exist.

26. Homework is used throughout the school to help pupils develop independence in learning and to reinforce the work covered. Although there is an inconsistency in its regularity and appropriateness in some subjects, and for some pupils, it is generally making a good contribution to learning.

27. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is very good for those withdrawn for specialist help. Both learning support teachers and assistants know the pupils well and plan their sessions to ensure that they are fully engaged in learning. The needs of pupils, as identified on their Individual Education Plans, are fully addressed and records are kept on their progress towards their targets. Teachers are generally aware of these very comprehensive plans and most use them to inform their teaching. However, most departments have not identified how they can best support pupils with special educational needs in their particular specialism and, therefore, specific targets and work are not yet in place. Learning support assistants work well with teachers to support pupils and are often fully integrated into the lesson, which enables pupils with special educational needs to progress well. The level of dialogue between teacher and assistant is generally good, although no specific time for joint planning is scheduled.

28. The one significant area for development is in the teaching of the basic skills of literacy. This lacks focus and a consistency of approach, particularly in Year 7. Across the whole curriculum, many opportunities for teaching and improving standards in this area are lost. There is also little consistency in the way teachers respond to written work. Pupils with special educational needs are given intensive help and some have classroom support but the general level of support through structured tasks to meet a range of needs in a class is often lacking. The teaching of basic skills of numeracy is good within mathematics and some subjects, such as design and technology, business studies, information and communication technology and geography reinforce these skills. However, elsewhere, opportunities are lost. In science, for example, the use of simple calculations and basic graphs is adequate, but rarely extensive.

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

29. The curriculum is generally broad and balanced at all stages, providing a good range of learning opportunities. Since the last inspection, pupils have benefited from increased curriculum opportunities, including a very good programme of extra-curricular activities and the development of stronger community links.

30. In Years 7 to 9, curriculum opportunities and pupils' access to them are good. All statutory requirements are met, and due consideration is given to the continuing changes in pupils' needs. Pupils now have separate lessons of information and communications technology, and other subjects make a contribution to this area of learning. Good allocations of time to English and mathematics reflect the school's aim of improving standards of literacy and numeracy, although greater focus needs to be given to the former. Within English, all pupils experience drama, literature and media studies. In Year 9 a degree of continuity of learning suffers in consequence of different teachers teaching these subjects as separate modules. Music and art are well developed and enjoy good allocations of time. Design technology and religious education are less generously provided for and have difficulty fulfilling the requirements of the National Curriculum in the time allocated. All pupils study either French or German, but there is no provision for a second foreign language. Provision for physical education is good, and includes athletics, dance, games and gymnastics.

31. The curriculum is also good in Years 10 and 11. The school provides an appropriately balanced range of courses and includes opportunities for pupils to make specialised choices. In addition to a conventional range of GCSEs, pupils have access to vocational courses leading to the GNVQ. In order to cater for their differing needs and interests, pupils are grouped in English in order to gain a double accreditation with either literature, drama or media studies. In science, art and design and design technology, pupils have a choice of different GCSE courses and examinations. A significant minority of lower attaining pupils, including some with special educational needs, study for alternative certificates, or choose a specially adapted, non-examination, vocational course containing fewer elements. This is an appropriate strategy for the pupils concerned, though it does disadvantage the school in relation to national league tables. Most pupils continue to study French or German and a few lower attainers benefit from a fresh start in a language. Some opt for Spanish. All pupils follow a short GCSE course in religious education, in response to statutory requirements.

32. The Post 16 curriculum is also good, offering a substantial number of A Level, A/S Level and GNVQ courses. The latter qualification is currently being replaced by AVCE. Pupils can choose to progress into employment or to higher education via an academic or vocational route. All pupils study additionally for a qualification in the key skills of literacy, numeracy and the use of information and communication technology. Recreational physical education, as well as a varied programme of study visits and cultural pursuits, further enrich their curriculum. Religious education is not yet part of the curriculum as required by law.

33. The programme of personal, social and health education is very good, and extends throughout each pupil's time in school. A trained team of specialist teachers teaches much of it, although all members of staff are variously involved. Professional experts teach some aspects such as fire safety, sex and drugs education, leisure and dental care. Pupils' work is thoroughly monitored and assessed, so that parents are kept informed of their child's personal and social development. The programme makes a good contribution to pupils' moral and social development.

34. There is also very good provision for careers education and guidance, beginning in Year 9 and continuing Post 16. The school's impressive programme of guidance is strongly supported by the local careers service and other agencies. Pupils learn in class how to analyse and record their own strengths and identify points for improvement. They research the requirements of different jobs, using information and communication technology and the careers library. Regular advice, readily accessible information and well-organised contacts with local employers contribute to informed decisions and the acquisition of appropriate qualifications. Work experience and a careers convention for pupils in Year 11 give further insights into career possibilities. A similarly high standard of vocational guidance is currently being developed for Post 16 pupils.

35. The provision of literacy and numeracy summer schools for pupils about to enter Churchdown indicates the school's commitment to raising standards in these two areas. Overall, the school is effective in its attempt to raise standards of numeracy. It has sensibly adopted the proposed national strategy in mathematics in the present Year 7. It has also adopted the recommended lesson structure in mathematics as standard throughout the school. Some other subjects, such as design and technology and geography, also make an appropriate contribution.

36. The school has not yet developed a successful strategy for raising standards in literacy. It is in the process of developing a policy that will ensure a consistent approach to literacy across all subject departments. There is a literacy co-ordinator who has conducted an audit of literacy across the curriculum. A number of departments pay particular attention to the vocabulary used in their subject. For instance, history teachers display key words for topics, use them in the lesson and then expect them to appear in pupils' writing. However, progress has been slow and there is still too little general awareness of the need to support pupils' reading and writing by teaching specific skills and by following agreed procedures in marking written work.

37. Careful thought has been given to enable pupils with special education needs to access the full curriculum. In Key Stage 3, for example, pupils who find difficulty with a modern foreign language are withdrawn for specific help; this is in addition to the support they receive with their English. In Key Stage 4, pupils are guided appropriately into a second English option, and a vocational course is available to help to prepare some for the world of work. One Sixth Form pupil with a statement of special educational need is successfully coping with three well chosen A Levels, with appropriate support from a learning support assistant.

38. The school has many long-standing and recently forged links with the local and wider community. They provide opportunities for pupils to extend their skills and expertise in sporting, artistic, musical and other activities. Governors bring to the curriculum the benefit of their varied experience through individual links with departments. Representatives from industry, local government and churches are regular visitors to the school. Teaching and learning in most subjects are extended through fieldwork, study trips in Britain or abroad and visits to local employers. Links with local primary schools assist pupils in their transition from primary to secondary education. However, curricular links are generally insufficiently developed and pupils in Year 7 repeat some work they have already done.

39. The school's programme of extra-curricular activities is very good. All subject areas provide clubs or organise events connected with their specialism. Transport is provided which enables pupils to attend activities after school. There is a good range of team games and other sports for boys and girls, some of which highlight particular talents. Concern by some parents about the limited opportunities for girls in sport appear unfounded. Several pupils play in county or national teams. Teachers make frequent use of galleries, museums, the theatre and other external resources. Large-scale stage productions and arts festivals combine the skills of many pupils. Parents speak highly of the school's residential provision, and give their willing support to the educational trips organised by departments. Despite a shortage of time during the school day and the long distances some pupils travel, the extra curricular life of the school continues to develop.

40. Provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Subjects contribute to moral development as pupils are encouraged to distinguish between right and wrong by good classroom practice and insistence on the school's behaviour code. In addition to this many teachers take opportunities to involve pupils in discussing topics that raise moral issues. For example, in science the issue of cloning is discussed; in business studies, such topics as equal pay and consumer matters.

41. Provision for social development is also good. In the classroom, teachers encourage the pupils to learn from and help each other when they participate in collaborative work. For example, in music lessons the pupils are often required to work in pairs and groups in composing and performing activities. Wider issues of social responsibility are raised in many subjects. For example, in a geography lesson pupils learn how people themselves may be the creators of hazards, for instance, by building on flood plains. The latter topic was effectively linked to recent local events.

42. Pupils' cultural development is provided for in subjects such as art, music, drama and religious education, each making a very significant contribution. The extensive programme of extra curricular activities makes a good contribution to pupils' cultural development. The school's Arts Week gave many pupils the opportunity to participate in activities involving the performing and visual arts. Since the last inspection the school has increased the number of opportunities for pupils to explore ideas, images and values from other cultures. However, there is still a need for development and in some subjects there is little opportunity for pupils to appreciate the richness of other cultures.

43. Provision for spiritual development remains less well developed, although it is satisfactory. The last inspection noted little evidence of the policies within departments being implemented. Some progress has now been made and more subjects are contributing to pupils' spiritual development. For example, in history, pupils reflect on the horrors of trench warfare in the First World War. Good use is made of music and literature to extend spirituality and religious education makes a very good contribution to overall provision. A significant number of subjects, however, are still making little contribution to this aspect. Assemblies are well planned and relate effectively to the pupils' personal development, encouraging them to reflect on issues and explore personal feelings. An assembly, which used the Chinese new year as a topic, linked this effectively to the use of time as well as giving an insight into the customs of other cultures. However, assemblies do not conform to the requirements for an act of daily collective worship.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

44. The support and guidance that the school provides for its pupils remains very good and is one of its strengths. Its impact on the development of pupils is considerable. There is a strong focus on the development of the whole person. Discussions with pupils and observations in lessons support the response of one young pupil to the question 'What does the school value?' to which he replied, 'Its pupils'. This view is strongly endorsed by parents. Pupils know that if they have queries or concerns they will be listened to, and their problems will be dealt with. This high quality provision is due to the well led pastoral teams. Specialist help is available on a weekly basis from a 'Teens in Crisis' counsellor for those with more serious problems. The support provided by the learning support department is also very good.

45. The implementation of a new policy since the last inspection has brought about a significant improvement in the arrangements for child protection. Four teachers are now trained as child protection liaison officers. Most teaching staff, and some non-teaching staff, have received appropriate guidance on how to deal with any incidents that may arise. The school needs to ensure that this is extended to all staff.

46. Health and safety are good, with a recently updated policy that has clear guidelines of responsibility and a safety committee that includes a governor. Sick and injured pupils receive good care from the welfare assistant. There is good monitoring of the site, including an annual audit by a specialist. All the necessary safety checks of equipment are made and risk assessments are in place. Fire practices occur regularly. During the inspection the fire alarm was triggered by an electrical fault and the school was evacuated quickly and efficiently. A few safety issues were identified during the inspection and reported to the school. They are being attended to.

47. There are good procedures in place for assessing pupils' attainment and progress, including those pupils with special educational needs. All subjects have policies that take clear account of the school's principles for assessment, although practice varies. However, in all areas, there is an extensive use of marks from regular class and homework assignments as well as end of unit tests. Occasionally there are results from a common task set to all pupils in a year group. Approaches to assessment are increasing in sophistication and data is increasingly providing clear guidance for curriculum planning and review in many subjects.

48. The procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' academic progress are good. A more coherent, consistent and unified approach to support and guidance is being developed at Key Stage 4. This includes the use of a progress file by each pupil. Form tutors have already been trained in aspects of this work, especially in interviewing pupils. Pupils at this stage are beginning to benefit from this positive approach to using assessment and other data and setting targets. Practice at Key Stage 3 is also being developed, but the support for pupils' progress in Years 7 to 9 is largely undertaken within subjects. The school is poised to benefit from these innovative and coherent approaches to guidance, in helping pupils to monitor their attainment, progress and personal development.

49. The school has good personal social and health education, and tutorial programmes to support and guide pupils' personal development. The former is taught as a discreet subject at Key Stages 3 and 4 and is a strength of the curriculum. Each form has one lesson a week taught by one of the six specialist members of the department. At least one of these lessons in each year is delivered by an outside professional from the local community, specialising in fire safety, dental care and drugs awareness. It is in these lessons that health, hygiene, drugs, relationships, safety, leisure and sex education are taught.

50. The school has a good behaviour policy, and effective procedures for rewarding good behaviour through the use of blue stickers and certificates. Unsatisfactory behaviour is dealt with effectively. There is a detention system that now includes community service on Saturday mornings. The school has developed good strategies to deal with pupils who are disaffected, as well as those who have been excluded several times. The latter involves the pastoral support programme, which is carefully tailored to the needs of each pupil. The recent involvement of business mentors to help pupils on this programme is working very well, as is the introduction of vocational courses. The school has effective procedures to deal with bullying, as reported by both pupils and parents.

51. Procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are good and have enabled the school to maintain a good level of attendance. The computerised registers are completed satisfactorily and the information is collated daily. A comprehensive attendance policy is adhered to. Three-day absence letters are sent out if parents have not contacted the school. The attendance data is used effectively to identify pupils whose attendance is of concern. The deputy head and attendance support assistant work closely with the Education Welfare officer to support these pupils. Their efforts play an important role in maintaining a good level of attendance. Parents are provided with good information about procedures for attendance and punctuality in pupils' personal organisers.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

52. Parents' views of the school are predominantly positive. The parents' questionnaires show that they think their children are making good progress and that the school expects pupils to work hard and achieve their best. They also feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem. Information from the parents' meeting and comments sent to inspectors reinforce the inspection findings, that the school continues to provide very good personal support and guidance for its pupils.

53. Some parents are concerned about the amount of homework. The pupils themselves expressed concerns about some homework taking longer than recommended, since it is not always set according to the homework time table, and it is not always being matched to their abilities. Overall, the setting of homework is good but varies across subjects and even teachers from very good to unsatisfactory.

54. Some parents do not feel that they are kept well informed about their child's progress. Evidence from the inspection does not support this. Parents receive information on pupils' progress each term by means of an effort grade sheet, full report or parents' evening. The quality of pupils' progress reports has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Reports are full and comprehensive. They outline the work covered, provide National Curriculum levels of attainment, grades for pupils' effort and core skills, comments by teachers and targets for improvement. The one area for further improvement would be to ensure all reports contain at least one subject-specific target for improvement. The school already has this in hand.

55. Inspectors also found no evidence to support the views of some parents that the school does not work closely with parents. Communications appear to be good, with staff being keen to work with all parents. These include messages sent and received, using pupils' organisers, letters, telephone calls, and opportunities for parents to see staff after school on Wednesdays.

56. The quality of the information provided for parents is good. There is a good home-school agreement that was produced in consultation with parents. Parents are invited to comment on pupils' reports but few do. The school provides a good range of meetings and documents to inform parents about what is taught and to guide pupils and parents about the options and subjects available at GCSE, GNVQ and A Level. In addition, the curriculum guides for Years 7 to 9 and for Years 10/11, which include details of extra-curricular activities, are very helpful. The one for Key Stage 4 is particularly good and includes an outline of each syllabus, the assessments, dates for work to be handed in and advice on coping with coursework. There are interesting monthly newsletters that celebrate the school's achievements and inform parents about a wide range of topics. The latest one includes information on Year 10 coursework, Year 9 careers choices and their relevance to pupils' choice of GCSE subjects.

57. Parents make a good contribution to the work of the school. The School Association provides social events, newsletters and raises money for additional items for the school. It is currently raising money for a new mini-bus. Parents also help, for example, with sport and charity events and provide some work experience placements. Most governors are parents or ex-parents and all parent governor positions are filled. Attendance at parents' meetings is good. The school reports that parents respond well to working with the school and that parental support for children's learning has a positive effect on the standards they achieve.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

58. The overall leadership and management of the school is good, with a very strong commitment to improvement. The headteacher provides clear, positive leadership. Since his appointment in 1997, he has worked successfully, in a measured way, to raise the quality of provision and standards of achievement. With the wider leadership team, which he established on appointment, he ensures that the school retains a focus on its values and aims. The full leadership team represents a good cross section of the school. It consists of the deputy headteacher, business manager, and five assistant headteachers with responsibility for aspects of the academic and pastoral life of the school. Together they work as a very effective team, focusing on the monitoring of teaching and the implementation of policies. There are clear strategies for bringing together the school improvement plan and for ensuring its successful implementation and review.

59. The quality of leadership and management at subject, pastoral, and administrative levels is good overall and has a positive effect upon standards and quality. For example, changes in history and geography, where new heads of department have been appointed since the last inspection, are bringing about significant improvement in standards. Members of the leadership team provide good support to those for whom they have oversight. The regular and systematic monitoring of the quality of teaching and the implementation of policy has improved and there is greater consistency than at the last inspection. Training needs are identified and action taken.

60. The governors are highly committed to the school. They have a very effective committee structure that enables them to work in partnership with the staff, provides them with a good level of awareness of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and helps them monitor developments. They share a clear understanding of the school's values and aims, and take ownership of the strategic plan that is reviewed annually and shapes other plans in the school. They have a high degree of trust in the headteacher and senior staff, with whom they have a good working relationship. They fulfil most of their statutory responsibilities, except that there is no provision for religious education in the Sixth Form, nor is there a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

61. The school's income is not as great as other schools nationally but, through careful financial planning, the school successfully manages its budget to provide a good quality education. The business manager works closely with the governors' finance committee and the headteacher and together they meet their objectives. The school improvement plan itself addresses an appropriate range of issues. It shows no costings, but cost centres are set up to monitor spending. The school uses specific grants appropriately to meet their intended purposes. Expenditure is carefully monitored and there is an awareness of emerging patterns of expenditure. The Sixth Form is now cost effective. Monies from community lettings and the dining facilities help the school to maintain a small annual reserve.

62. In general, there is a sufficient number of qualified and experienced teachers to meet curriculum needs. However, there are a few subjects where a number of staff, some non-specialists, teach only a few lessons and have other responsibilities. This does not generally affect the quality of learning, although it raises issues of training and multiple roles. The provision of non-teaching staff is very good, with departments such as mathematics benefiting from the work of a technician. Many of these staff have specialist training and the newly created 'Support Staff' department will focus on their on-going training needs. This development illustrates a commendable whole school approach to staff development and is in line with the school's application for 'Investors In People' status. Administrative and secretarial staff are effective in ensuring the school runs efficiently on a day to day basis.

63. Professional development is a strength of the school. Following an analysis of the age profile of the staff, and taking account of professional development needs, a group of staff has been encouraged to undertake middle management training. A fifth have done so and report positively on the experience. It will enable them to play a constructive role within the performance management framework. Heads of department observe teachers in the classroom and written reports are produced. There is a system of staff development interviews that generate targets for improvement, in line with school and departmental aims. These are integrated into the school's training plans and suitable training opportunities are found.

64. Induction and support procedures for newly qualified teachers and teachers new to the school are most effective. There is a very well organised induction programme. Newly qualified teachers have six lessons where they do not teach and this enables them to prepare lessons, or take part in activities that will extend their professional skills. The overall quality of teaching seen during the inspection is an indication of the high quality of this provision, as is the fact that competitors from the school regularly reach the regional finals for the best newly-qualified teacher.

65. The school is equally successful as a trainer of undergraduate teachers. Senior management feels that there is a moral responsibility to train future teachers but they are also aware that participation has raised the profile of teaching within the school. Staff who act as mentors have had to focus on the essence of good teaching and learning, thereby enabling the school to meet its target of an improvement in this area. The sharing of good practice, which the last OFSTED report considered to be weak, has also increased.

66. Current accommodation is satisfactory overall. Since the last inspection the head teacher and governors have addressed issues of accommodation highlighted in the report. They pursued their aim of consolidating subject teaching rooms in particular parts of the school. As far as possible each subject has a preparation space, sometimes shared with other related subjects. English and religious education departments are now in a new building. However, some parts of the school show signs of wear and tear and space remains restricted in a number of subjects, such as mathematics and modern foreign languages. Growth in the size of the Sixth Form makes teaching space tight for vocational education courses. The library/resource centre is small for the numbers of pupils, restricting access during the school day. Space is also limited in a number of areas for more computers, which pupils use increasingly for research. Plans have been approved to provide additional accommodation for autumn 2001. The governors inspect accommodation regularly and minor repairs are carried out; many by the site maintenance team. This team has also made adaptations that have enhanced facilities.

67. Learning resources overall are good. Most subject departments have sufficient resources to meet teaching and learning needs. They are appropriate, in sound condition, and accessible to pupils. The library/resource centre continues to provide a valuable area of support to the curriculum. The library resources co-ordinator shows new pupils how to use the resources. She gives good support to teachers by assembling resources for particular topics, and she draws upon the resources available from the schools library service and museums. A new section called *Quick Read* is stocked with books suitable for pupils with weak reading skills.

68. Overall the school and its staff are well managed. The principles of best value are evident in its work and it provides good value for money.

SIXTH FORM PROVISION

69. Recent results in the Sixth Form were below national average. Pupils taking two or more GCE or Vocational Advanced Level courses gained 15.5 points compared with 18.2 nationally. In lessons and work seen, overall standards are improving and are closer to national average, with some variation between the different courses. Pupils taking GCE Advanced and Subsidiary Level in art, information and communications technology and drama are performing above average, whilst those taking English, geography, information technology, science and mathematics reach standards in line with those nationally.

70. In most Sixth Form courses, pupils achieve well in relation to their previous GCSE results because of the consistently good and very good teaching. However, pupils taking the GNVQ and Advanced Vocational courses in areas of leisure and health and social care make unsatisfactory progress, and those courses have completion rates considerably below those nationally.

71. Pupils are positive about their studies and increasing numbers choose the Sixth Form to pursue further education. Many pupils participate in the extra-curricular activities and help run the Sixth Form committee, though greater curriculum demands result in fewer of them now contributing to the school in other ways, such as helping with learning support.

72. The school has an open access Sixth Form and has responded well to the new curriculum initiatives, as part of its efforts to provide a broad and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of most pupils. There are over 20 different GCE Advanced/ Advanced Subsidiary and Advanced Vocational Level courses that cover most of the main subjects. These include all sciences, mathematics and the other main National Curriculum subjects. Greater breadth is provided through Advanced Subsidiary levels in music, business studies, media studies, computing, sports studies and a number of vocational courses in leisure, travel and tourism, information technology and health and social care. A positive development is the way in which a third of Year 12 pupils, taking one year and two year programmes, now gain a more varied educational experience through combining academic and vocational courses.

73. All pupils take courses in those key skills that are increasingly important for Higher Education and employment. They include communication, application of number and information and communication technology, and are valuable in developing pupil competence and confidence. The school is exploring the most effective means of developing and assessing key skills in taught lessons and through project work in the pupils' academic and vocational courses.

74. Pupils are also able to participate in timetabled recreational physical education and benefit from a tutorial programme that endeavours to develop study skills, address important moral and social issues and give a preparation for Higher Education and employment. However, there are no assemblies and the tutorial programme does not sufficiently cover the statutory requirement for religious education. A range of extra-curricular activities that includes art visits abroad, regular drama events, close links with local industry and media organisations, as well as different sports teams, further enhances the Sixth Form.

75. The school is in the process of further improving academic monitoring and target setting in which the Sixth Form tutors play an important role. Currently, tutors are effective in monitoring the attendance and effort of pupils and in collating the progress in their different subjects. Monitoring and support in a number of the GNVQ courses is less effective and because of this the drop out rate of pupils is higher than the average found nationally.

76. The management of the Sixth Form is good, with the head of Sixth Form and tutors playing a major role in the academic, personal and social development of the pupils. The school also ensures that pupils have a well planned and smooth transition from Key Stage 4 into the Sixth Form through a Post 16 development group that supports the work of the head of Sixth Form. This group brings together pastoral heads and careers and vocational education staff who help advise and plan curriculum and guidance provision.

77. The school has a separate Sixth Form block that includes teaching and private study areas. Those areas are stretched by the increasing numbers of pupils, though the school has a development plan that will improve teaching rooms and address the lack of specific information and communication technology facilities for Sixth Form pupils.

78. The Sixth Form is an increasingly important and cost effective feature of the school. Whilst it needs to improve its vocational education provision, the improved curriculum breadth, the development of pupil monitoring and rising levels of attainment represent good progress since the

last inspection.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

79. The issues identified in the school's strategic plan 2000 are clear and appropriate. In order to improve further the quality of education and the standards achieved the governors and senior staff should enhance aspects of this plan in order to focus and take action on:

- Improving results in national tests and examinations, particularly at Key Stage 3 and in GNVQ courses in the Sixth Form by:
 - * continuing to develop the unified approach to support and guidance to ensure all pupils benefit from effecting monitoring;
 - * strengthening support for those on GNVQ courses in order to reduce the number who fail to gain accreditation;
 - * improving the continuity of learning in Year 9 English.

- Improving pupils' literacy skills, particularly in the early years by:
 - * finalising a whole school literacy policy and ensuring a consistent approach in its implementation across all subjects;
 - * identifying pupils' needs earlier in Year 7 and providing greater and more immediate support for those pupils.

- Raising the level of all teaching and learning to the level of the best in order to meet the needs of all pupils by:
 - * ensuring that a suitable range of materials and strategies are developed in subjects to help support pupils of higher and lower ability;
 - * continuing to monitor the quality of teaching and learning, share good practice and provide good quality professional development in line with the strategic plan.

- Continuing to make better use of data by:
 - * enabling all staff to interpret data appropriately;
 - * ensuring heads of department know and understand national benchmarks and judge their subject's performance in the light of these;
 - * monitoring the use and application of data in respect of curriculum and lesson planning and target setting.

- Taking appropriate action in respect of religious education in the Sixth Form and a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	198
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	58

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5	32	40	20	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	Y7 – Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1173	188
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	97	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	26	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	230	1

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

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	50
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	59

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7
National comparative data	5.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.4
National comparative data	0.4

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	120	110	230

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	45	74	77
	Girls	69	64	53
	Total	114	138	130
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	50 (62)	60 (60)	57 (44)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	7 (11)	24 (34)	15 (10)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	98	75	93
	Girls	105	64	92
	Total	205	139	185
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	88 (81)	60 (59)	80 (75)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	24 (33)	24 (35)	17 (23)
	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	109	90	199

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	43	97	101
	Girls	53	86	87
	Total	96	183	188
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	48 (51)	92 (97)	94 (97)
	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	37
	National	38.4

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
	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	33	32	65

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	13.8	17.0	15.4	2.0	3.0	2.4
National	17.7	18.6	18.2	2.6	2.9	2.7

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

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	0	N/A
	National	N/A	76.5

International Baccalaureate		Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied	School	0	N/A
	National	N/A	76.5

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	8
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	4
Indian	3
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	1322
Any other minority ethnic group	20

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	2	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	68	4
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes:

Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	74.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff:

Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	20
Total aggregate hours worked per week	572

Deployment of teachers:

Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78.6
---	------

Average teaching group size:

Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	27.5
Key Stage 4	22.0

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
----------------	------------------

	£
Total income	3074085.00
Total expenditure	3027545.00
Expenditure per pupil	2324.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	112176.00
Balance carried forward to next year	158716.00

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1361
Number of questionnaires returned	318

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	26	63	10	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	33	58	6	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	17	58	10	4	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	15	58	19	7	1
The teaching is good.	24	62	6	2	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	26	48	20	5	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	46	43	7	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	49	44	4	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	25	50	19	4	3
The school is well led and managed.	34	49	6	2	9
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	28	60	8	2	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	31	51	7	3	9

Other issues raised by parents

A few parents at the parents' meeting raised concerns about poor behaviour in some lessons. Inspectors noted that at times pupils presented challenging behaviour but teachers managed these situations very well and the inspectors saw no evidence that learning was adversely affected. Management of pupils was a strength of the teaching overall.

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

ENGLISH

80. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with standards in English that are below national averages. They do not find it easy to express themselves formally in speaking or in writing, and their vocabulary and reading skills are generally limited. During their first three years, they gain confidence as speakers and their reading improves but they do not make the progress they should in written English. Results in the national tests for fourteen-year-olds are well below average, nationally and for similar schools, with very few pupils reaching the higher National Curriculum levels. These results reflect the standards of writing in folders, where presentation, spelling and punctuation are careless and, for many pupils, expectations of effort are low.

81. At Key Stage 4 the picture is far better. During Years 10 and 11 pupils make good progress in all aspects of the subject. The most recent GCSE results in English are very close to the national average, while those in English literature are well above. Course-work folders of pupils of all levels of attainment in the current Year 11, including those with special educational needs, show progress from the start of Key Stage 4. The work is well presented and clearly structured. It has benefited from the drafting and redrafting process that is a policy of the department.

82. Results in the GCE Advanced Level examination have improved steadily over the last four years. In 2000 all those entered passed, and the number gaining the two highest grades was above average for all maintained secondary schools. Progress through the course is good.

83. Pupils have good attitudes to work in English lessons. They concentrate well in class at all stages and in their oral contributions show good understanding of the concepts covered. They get on well with their teachers and with each other. In almost all lessons behaviour is good, and even on the rare occasions when individual pupils are difficult teachers manage the situation well and work is not disrupted.

84. Teaching overall is good. Nearly three quarters of the lessons seen were good, and half of these were very good or excellent. Only one lesson was judged to be unsatisfactory but even here relationships and management of behaviour were strong. Teachers have good knowledge of their subject and are clear in their understanding of its application to examination courses at GCSE and GCE Advanced Level.

85. Teaching at Key Stage 3 is less well focused on meeting the needs of individual pupils, and expectations of what they can do, particularly in their writing, are too low. In the most successful lessons teachers are aware of strengths and weaknesses within the class. For a poetry lesson in Year 8 there were question sheets of varying difficulty to support different needs as the pupils worked to understand meaning, and the teacher constantly checked that all

pupils were making progress. However, in two thirds of the lessons seen in Years 7, 8 and 9, while there was often good pace and purpose and great enjoyment, individual problems were not dealt with adequately and the more competent pupils were not challenged by the tasks. Assessment of written work tends to be bland and lacking in detailed advice: a set of Year 7 folders, for example, appeared to have been hurriedly marked and work of very different standards had been graded at the same level.

86. At Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form, the courses are clearly delivered. Expectations of work levels are realistically ambitious and teachers are very well aware of how closely pupils are meeting examination requirements. Lessons are carefully structured to provide a variety of activities, and all aspects of the subject – speaking and listening, reading and writing – are provided for in a focused and productive way. For instance in a lesson on media in Year 11, the aims for the session were written on the board and announced by the teacher. There was focused study of a video extract and pupils worked in groups, with clearly stated expectations of what should be achieved, including proper use of technical terms. At the end of the lesson, progress was reviewed and it was evident that progress had been made. There is more generous staffing at this stage. All classes are smaller than those in Key Stage 3 and in Years 10 and 11 pupils who need more individual support are taught in very small groups, with additional support from the learning support department.

87. The curriculum is organised in an imaginative and stimulating way. In Year 9 pupils follow a modular course for two terms, studying drama, media writing and literature, each with a different teacher whose special interest the aspect is. Unfortunately, this leaves a very short time to bring coherence to the subject before the national tests and this has some bearing on the results the school is achieving at that stage. At Key Stage 4, pupils have a choice of courses within the subject, so that they can concentrate on literature, drama or media together with English language, which they all take. The department makes an important contribution to the extra-curricular activities offered by the school. As well as the weekly English club and the periodic money-raising events, members of the team run a summer literacy school for pupils about to transfer from primary school, and at Easter there is a film school for pupils interested in media.

88. The head of department works very hard to lead and manage a large team, several of whom have responsibility elsewhere in the school. Relationships are good and several staff within the department take charge of aspects of the work. The need now is for closer monitoring in order to achieve more consistency in teaching and better standards in Key Stage 3.

Drama

89. In Years 7 and 8 drama is taught within English lesson time by members of the department with the head of drama providing the scheme of work. In Year 9, at the end of Key Stage 3 the head of drama teaches the subject, supporting the study of the Shakespeare text for the national English test. Standards at this stage are good and pupils who decide to choose the subject as a GCSE course are well prepared for its demands.

90. The most recent GCSE results were outstanding: a considerably larger than average number of candidates took the examination and all achieved a pass in the higher grades. The level of commitment to the course is very high. In a class of Year 11, pupils worked in groups on different texts to plan presentations in preparation for their examination scripted task. The texts had been allocated to suit the level of each group and in every case pupils were well organised and imaginative, showing a very good grasp of dramatic technique. They made clear progress in analysing their piece and responded well to the teacher's questions and suggestions. When one of the groups presented its work, the rest of the class showed good powers of analysis.

91. At GCE Advanced Level results are also outstanding. In the last examination all candidates passed, most of them at the higher level. Work seen in Year 13 was impressive in the maturity and sophistication of decision-making as pupils prepared for their final presentation and assessment.

92. All the teaching of drama is very good at all stages. The teacher works in collaboration with his pupils and this relationship goes beyond the classroom into the excellent public performances that are prepared for throughout the year. Through these the pupils have excellent opportunities to work together on major projects that enhance the life of the school.

MATHEMATICS

93. On entry to the school, pupils' attainment is below the national average in mathematics and the other core subjects. There are very few high attainers. Standards of attainment in the 2000 National Curriculum tests at age 14 were just below those expected nationally. The proportion achieving higher levels was well below national averages. There was little difference in the attainment of boys and girls and the results were similar to those for the previous year. The results were also similar to those for science but significantly higher than those for English.

94. In the GCSE examinations in 2000, pupils attained just below the national average for both grades A* to C and A* to G. There was little difference in the attainment of boys and girls and the results were similar to those for the previous year.

95. At A Level pupils attained around the national average for grades A to E. This was lower than in the previous year, though the small numbers entering the examination make comparisons inappropriate. The aggregated figures for passes over the past three years are above national averages.

96. The results in tests and national examinations show at least satisfactory progress in both Key Stage 3 and in Key Stage 4. Progress in the Sixth Form is good for the small groups of A Level pupils. Standards in lessons and written work are generally slightly higher than in test and examination results. By the end of both Key Stage 3 and of Key Stage 4, pupils' work is generally near the national average. Work in Year 13 in the Sixth Form is in line with

national standards for A Level mathematics pupils. This is as a result of the major effort made by the department over the past year to improve standards. They have introduced the National Numeracy Strategy structures in Year 7, a new procedure for grouping pupils on the basis of prior attainment in Year 9, a comprehensive on-line assessment programme and a new approach to teaching and learning styles throughout all years. These initiatives are beginning to have a positive effect on teaching and learning and consequently on attainment.

97. Standards in the different aspects of the subject follow the general picture except in the use of number where standards are generally lower. Numeracy standards are low on entry to the school but are rising as the National Numeracy Strategy takes effect in feeder schools and as a result of the school's own initiatives. By the end of Key Stage 3, many of the higher-attaining pupils can estimate probability confidently but some lower attaining pupils find decimal addition difficult. By the end of Key Stage 4, higher-attaining pupils can solve quadratic equations with confidence but many lower attaining pupils struggle with basic multiplication of simple whole numbers. In Year 13 pupils are able to apply successfully their knowledge of differential calculus to complex parametric equations. Numeracy skills are regularly exercised effectively in science, design and technology, business studies, information and communication technology and geography. Generally, presentation skills are good and pupils enjoy answering and showing off their understanding of the subject, using appropriate terminology.

98. Pupils are beginning to use information and communication technology effectively in mathematics lessons. Good use was seen in one Key Stage 3 lesson where pupils used spreadsheets to analyse height data from the class. The pupils were able to present their data in graphical form with confidence. The use of information and communication technology is very motivating for pupils. The department realises that it should develop its use further within the mathematics curriculum but is prevented from doing so by shortage of facilities. Pupils use calculators appropriately and accurately in lessons. Good use is also being made of graphical calculators.

99. Pupils' progress in lessons is generally good and is improving as a result of the new initiatives in both the school and in the department. The three-part structure to lessons with an emphasis on pupil participation is helping to motivate pupils and helps teachers to enliven presentation. The emphasis on developing basic numeracy skills is appreciated by pupils who enjoy real life mathematical situations. This was seen in a Key Stage 3 lesson where Year 8 pupils learned how to make effective estimates of decimal cash sums having selected goods from a model shop. Likewise pupils were seen to make very good progress in applying their mathematical skills in investigations. This was illustrated in a thorough Year 11 statistical investigation into pebble sizes on the seashore and a sophisticated Year 13 analysis of the shape and form of common periwinkles. Pupils with special educational needs also generally make good progress in lessons and the higher-attaining Key Stage 4 pupils who elect to take statistics as an additional GCSE out of normal school hours make good progress too.

100. Teaching in the department is generally good with nearly one half of lessons very good. Only one lesson was assessed as satisfactory and none were unsatisfactory. The department responded to criticisms expressed in the previous inspection concerning teaching and learning. The new structure and approach involves pupils more in the learning process. This represents good progress since the previous inspection. Lessons are well prepared and generally well paced. Teachers know their subject matter and use the new structure well. Relationships are almost invariably good and pupils usually enjoy learning and showing off their understanding in lessons. Pupils find participation both enjoyable and also an effective means to learning. Pupils also enjoy learning while using data from the real world as shown in Year 7, data-handing work seen on classroom walls and in much investigative work. This is a great motivator in terms of learning. Pupil motivation is generally good and often pupils learn well when working in pairs. They enjoy using their information and communication technology skills in mathematics lessons. Teachers generally have expectations of good behaviour and work. Teachers' increased use of assessment and the display of test results also help pupils learn more effectively. The new on-line assessment procedures give pupils and staff instant updates on attainment and progress. Pupils are very interested in improving their performance in mathematics and enjoy helping to set new targets. Very occasionally, individual pupils lose concentration and cause minor interruptions to learning but teachers usually deal with these problems quickly and effectively.

101. The department is very well led by a dedicated, very hardworking, sensitive professional who leads by example. He monitors all aspects of teaching and has a well-structured department with important responsibilities sensibly delegated to his team. All the staff work very hard to raise standards and it is likely that they will be rewarded by improved test and examination results in the near future. The department has been active in promoting and developing mathematics in the past two years. Initiatives include the GCSE statistics course for higher attainers in Key Stage 4, introducing Decision Mathematics as an option at A Level, mathematics days for the whole school, revision clubs, maths challenges, maths weekly competitions, maths ties and master classes. Since the previous inspection the department has made good progress by improving teaching significantly, developing a very good on-line assessment system and by introducing structures to raise standards of numeracy.

SCIENCE

102. On entry to the school pupils' standards of science are in line with national averages and have been so for the last four years. They are better than standards in English and mathematics. In National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3, the average point score is below the national average, and although the proportion achieving Level 5 or better is close to that expected, the proportion achieving Level 6 or better is well below national and Local Education Authority figures. Standards remain consistently better than in the other core subjects. Work observed indicates that most pupils are achieving at expected levels although there are only a few achieving at the highest levels. Although pupils with special educational needs make good progress, overall, pupils make unsatisfactory progress at Key Stage 3 and this picture has been consistent for the last three years.

103. At Key Stage 4, the percentage of those entered achieving an A* to G grade in GCSE science is above the national average, while the proportion achieving higher grades (A* to C) is close to it. Again, at Key Stage 4 boys do better than girls despite girls' better performance in other subjects and overall. Work seen shows satisfactory levels of achievement. However, even in top sets few are achieving at the highest levels. The progress at Key Stage 4 is above average, leading to satisfactory progress across the school.

104. A Level results are satisfactory in all three sciences and there has been a 100 per cent pass rate in the last two years. The department appears not to carry out value-added analysis but progress is at least satisfactory.

105. Behaviour is generally good within the department. Pupils show respect for each other and the equipment provided. They pay particular attention to health and safety, using masks without undue prompting and showing considerable care in handling potentially dangerous chemicals and apparatus. Pupils are polite and forthcoming to visitors and talk confidently and positively about their experience in science. Occasional chattering and interrupting of the teacher was observed especially in Year 8. With the exception of Sixth Formers, pupils showed little inclination to go beyond the task set or to apply genuine intellectual effort. In a group of higher-attaining pupils in Year 10, where pupils were studying leaves, none considered using hand lenses or microscopes for fine detail. By contrast a Year 13 physics group were happy to stay well beyond the end of school to continue an in-depth piece of coursework of their own design.

106. Teaching is good or very good in half the lessons and generally satisfactory in others. Only two lessons observed were unsatisfactory. Teachers show superb subject knowledge and put this to good effect, particularly at Key Sage 4 and in the Sixth Form. Resources are used effectively, although computers present in each laboratory are not sufficiently exploited except with the Sixth Form. Planning is satisfactory, with good objectives identified, although not enough attention is given to meeting the needs of different ability groups within any one class.

107. All lessons benefit from a clear structure that includes a focused review of previous work and the setting of objectives for the lesson. Teachers provide a range of activities and lessons end with good consolidation and the setting of appropriate homework tasks that link to future work. This produces adequate pace in most lessons and contributes to sound classroom management. However, the routine use of this set pattern for all classes limits the opportunities for in-depth work, challenge of thinking and conceptual development. An expectation that the task will soon be terminated discourages those who finish quickly from showing initiative to explore further, and makes the matching of learning activity to prior levels of attainment difficult, especially for the more able pupils. A mixed ability Year 7 group enthusiastically carried out tests on rocks with acid rain, but the activity was brought to an end before they had finished, curtailing opportunities to experiment in greater depth and dampening their enthusiasm.

108. The teaching methods show some variety, although there is room for further development. Question and answer sessions mostly generate one-word answers and thus miss opportunities to challenge pupils. Where longer answers are encouraged, pupils show that they are capable of more in-depth responses, as was demonstrated in the review of photosynthesis with a Year 10 class. Homework is set, but again sometimes lacks challenge. This is related to the limited attention given to the development of literacy that contributes to some under-achievement especially at Key Stage 3. Marking is reasonably thorough and usually provides constructive feedback and targets, although this varies from teacher to teacher.

109. Curriculum planning is under-developed and schemes of work lack detail. This contributes to the lack of attention paid to matching learning activities to prior knowledge and understanding and the rather routine teaching techniques. Resources are good and displays enliven all the laboratories and make links with real life science such as satellites and aircraft development. An impressive range of industry links supports this connection with the practice of science.

110. Overall leadership and management are satisfactory. The teamwork of the department is good. However, the management of performance is under-developed, and there is scope to make further use of formal lesson observation to improve the repertoire of teaching methods. Management and improvement plans are satisfactory, and identify the main priorities with appropriate targets, although these are not well known in the department.

111. Overall, progress has been made since the last inspection in raising A Level standards and improving the consistency in standards of teaching. This latter has not yet resulted in higher standards of attainment, particularly at Key Stage 3, but provides a good base for further development.

ART AND DESIGN

112. Pupils arrive at the school with a wide range of knowledge and experience of art, many with levels of achievement below national expectations for pupils at that age. By age 14, standards of achievement are in line with national expectations. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A* to C in the GCSE examination in 2000 was above national averages. The number of pupils taking the A Level examination was too small to make a fair comparison with national figures. The results at both GCSE and A Level in 2000 were significantly weaker than in previous years, during which the department has raised standards to well above the national average. The trend over the past three years has been significantly downward for girls, whilst boys have almost halved the gender gap over that time. Evidence from the very good teaching and very good standards of work seen during the inspection strongly suggest that the department's positive forecast of a rise in examination standards this year is fully justified.

113. Contextual studies are well taught at Key Stage 3 and pupils learn about the life and work of important artists from different cultures. In Year 7 pupils develop their observational skills successfully and they show a sound understanding of the use of symbolism through their study of the work of Picasso. Year 8 pupils recognise the style of pop art and higher-attaining pupils are able to identify the works of artists such as Warhol, Hamilton and Liechtenstein, and can describe the techniques they used. Pupils in Year 9 show good imagination in exploring Rousseau's technique and applying them to the picture frames they design in the style of Freida Kahlo. There is good evidence in sketch books that most pupils are learning to annotate their work and take notes on the artists they study.

114. Pupils at Key Stage 4 display their colouring skills in some stunning pieces of work, based on a range of artists. They learn to form and hollow clay and are able to control very large coiled pot forms, applying and etching spiral shapes to embellish them in creative ways. Using knowledge gained from a recent and very successful visit of a professional puppeteer, teachers challenge the pupils' constructional skills in forming figures from rolled newspaper and modroc. They explore human posture as they develop their figures. By age 16 they have made good progress through the key stage and their attainment is above national averages.

115. The work of pupils in the Sixth Form shows a significant rise in standard. It is more mature, confident and researched in greater depth as they work towards the AS and A Level examinations. It also shows that the pupils have learned much from the many well-organised visits they make to local and national galleries of art. Their work shows the influence of the very wide range of artists they have studied at school. This ranges from the Altimira cave drawings and Aboriginal art, to the work of Damien Hirst, and the environmental art of Goldsworthy and Christo. By age 18, the work of pupils indicates attainment levels above, and often well above, national standards.

116. The response of pupils to lessons is good overall at Key Stage 3, improving to very good at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form. Overall, behaviour is good at Key Stage 3; although a few lessons are spoiled by restive and noisy pupils. Most listen attentively to the class teacher and respond sensibly when questioned about their work. They show some frustration when the teacher's introduction is unnecessarily long. Older pupils show strong commitment to their work, putting a considerable creative effort into it. At all stages, pupils are polite and courteous to adults and are confident in talking about their work.

117. The quality of teaching is very good overall. It is never less than good and on occasions it is excellent. Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of their subject area. They are enthusiastic and committed to the teaching of art and they plan lessons very well. The majority of lessons are well paced, starting with a brief introduction and ending with a well-planned 'gallery session'. In this session, the work done in the lesson is laid out for critical scrutiny by the teacher and by the pupils. The self-confidence of pupils is strengthened through these sessions. Their critical awareness and appreciation of their own and other's work are also sharpened in this way. Very good relationships are built up in lessons, often supported by a good sense of humour. Teachers establish a very good working environment that allows pupils to make very good progress. Teachers have appropriately high expectations of standards of work and behaviour. The use of computers to support art is well advanced and pupils have produced some very good, large-scale image manipulations.

118. The department benefits from strong and experienced leadership. There is a clear, shared commitment to the improvement of standards. There is a good system for monitoring improvements made in the teaching and learning process over time. New staff have brought fresh ideas to the department, ensuring that enthusiasm is maintained amongst teachers and pupils alike. Teachers work well together as a team and provide a very good, broad and balanced curriculum for pupils. Accommodation overall is satisfactory. Although existing specialist studio accommodation is very good, there is currently one unsuitable room being used and there is a lack of Sixth Form provision. The school has been very successful in displaying the work of pupils over a wide local area, including the County Arts Festival, although there is insufficient dedicated display space around the school itself. The department has displayed work in London, including a display at the Millennium Dome. It has worked well with the music and drama departments to put on high quality, well attended multi-media performances at the school.

119. The department has made a good response to the last inspection report. The quality of teaching has improved and resources are now used effectively in all lessons. Critical studies have improved considerably, building from Year 7 through to the Sixth Form. Three-dimensional studies are now a strength of the department. Although attainment in examinations suffered a sharp decline last year, the very good teaching and the high standard of work seen during the inspection indicate that the department is set to make a very good improvement in the coming years.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

120. In the 2000 Key Stage 3 teacher assessments, Year 9 pupils reached standards a little above average. The GCSE results over the last two years were also above average for those achieving higher grades A* to C. Most pupils perform better in design and technology compared with their overall average in other subjects. In the Sixth Form, the numbers taking GCE A Level in design and technology have tended to be small. However, over many years, all pupils have been successful and have often exceeded expectations based on their previous GCSE results.

121. Standards in Year 9 are lower than in recent years, partly because of the lower attainment of pupils on entry to the school, and partly because of the reduction in curriculum time. In work and lessons seen, standards are close to national average. Most pupils show familiarity with a simple design and make process, and use key terms appropriately. This was evident in a textiles technology class where pupils worked on generating design ideas and carrying out a market research activity. In food technology, pupils demonstrate a capacity to use materials and tools with some confidence and accuracy. In a year 9 lesson, pupils with special educational needs benefited from two support staff. In resistant materials, pupils understand material properties and use tools with some accuracy, for example, in constructing a mechanical toy and simple electronic circuit. In folder work across the key stage, pupils

understand simple design and have skills in planning and evaluating their work, though the limited responses required on many worksheets do not help develop writing skills. Overall, despite the limited time, the good teaching ensures that pupils make satisfactory gains in knowledge and skills in their use of materials. Higher levels of understanding and skills in systems and control, information and communications technology and graphics are less well developed.

122. In lessons and work seen at Key Stage 4, attainment is above the national average. In graphic products, pupils produce accurate and well presented work showing an understanding of different forms of projection. The higher-attaining pupils produce a wider range of project designs that reflect independent research and analysis. Food technology pupils understand the design stages, through their use of prototypes and evaluation. In all courses, pupils show particular strengths in practical making. For example, in a Year 11 resistant materials lesson, pupils confidently used a wide range of hand tools and produced work of a high standard. The higher-attaining pupils also produced good models in their initial product development. The middle and lower-attaining pupils have more limited awareness of an industrial context and research and product analysis is less thorough. Standards across all four design and technology courses available are uniformly above average, though the use of information and communications technology in research and presentation is limited. Even so, pupils achieve well at GCSE with a noticeable improvement in the standard of both folder work and practical outcomes as pupils progress through Years 10 and 11.

123. At GCE A and AS Levels, the pass rate is in line with course averages, but the proportion achieving the highest grades is below. The design and technology pupils have an appreciation of product design and most use annotated graphics well to show the development of their design ideas. The textiles pupil demonstrates good research and practical skills in a well presented folder. Achievement for Sixth Form pupils is good, in that most start with modest GCSE attainment and make considerable progress in successfully reaching the required GCE Advanced Level standard.

124. Teaching standards are mostly high and never less than satisfactory. In three quarters of lessons teaching was good or very good. The staff share their enthusiasm for their subject and plan lessons thoroughly. Where teaching is less strong, it tends to be because the teacher is less assertive in dealing with the more challenging pupils, and this slows learning. Also, whole class presentations do not involve pupils sufficiently through questioning to confirm and consolidate understanding. However, in the great majority of lessons, class management is very effective in terms of establishing high expectations about work and behaviour. This was demonstrated in the effort and care shown by pupils in much of their work done in the workrooms and at home. The good teaching is based on strong specialist knowledge and an emphasis on developing an understanding and use of technical language. As result, pupils in food technology learnt how to, for example, analyse food products and evaluate their own practical outcomes. The very good teaching, seen in nearly a quarter of lessons, was sensitive to the needs of different pupils, particularly those with special educational needs. This was well reflected a Year 7 lesson where such pupils were given additional support and homework materials that helped those with differing literacy skills. Very good practice also includes lucid and thorough explanations and effective questioning. This was the case in a Year 12 product design lesson, where pupils were beginning to appreciate the aesthetics of, and constraints on, design.

125. Assessment practice has improved since the last inspection, with greater consistency in the use of design and technology technical language and assessment criteria. Practice is good in GCSE and GCE Advanced Level work where it largely provides clear guidance to help pupils improve and teachers use assessment outcomes to refocus their teaching. Assessment in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory, though National Curriculum criteria are not so well integrated into assessment activities.

126. The well planned schemes of work reflect changes in the National Curriculum but there has been a more limited response to the gaps in Key Stage 3 coverage identified in the last report. The reduction by a third in teaching and learning time in Years 7 to 9 has also seriously hampered efforts to develop systems and control, improve pupils' graphical skills and increase the planned use of information and communications technology. The textiles and food strands of design and technology are better served in terms of teaching time and make good use of it.

127. The management of the subject is good and has been effective in establishing a coherent approach across all areas; a concern raised in the previous inspection report. The team building has been an important feature of this and the excellent staff relationships continue. Even so, aspects of staff development, particularly that relating to information and communications technology, need strengthening. The well maintained and organised resources are sufficient in the current situation but there is a lack of facilities to improve systems and control including access to computers, and little or no spare capacity in staffing and accommodation to cope with the need to increase curriculum provision.

GEOGRAPHY

128. Teachers' assessments of Key Stage 3 pupils' work in 2000 showed attainment below national expectations at the end of the key stage. The standard of pupils' work seen on inspection is much closer to national expectations. Higher-attaining pupils in Year 9 use statistics of population growth and land area in Japan to quickly plot graphs. They show a good grasp of the pros and cons of various ways of providing more living space. Progress of lower-attaining pupils is slow when writing answers, and their spelling of simple words is weak.

129. In GCSE examinations in 2000 the percentage of pupils achieving grades A* to G was in line with the national average, but the proportion achieving higher grades was below the national average. When compared with other subjects, pupils attained over half a grade better in other subjects than in geography. Results were below those of the previous two years. The head of geography attributes the reasons for the decline in 2000 to weaker coursework by some pupils, and underachievement by some pupils expected to gain higher grades. Structured coursework and careful monitoring are addressing these concerns. Standards of work now are broadly in line with those found nationally. Higher-attaining pupils work quickly and accurately. For example, Year 11 pupils drew graphs to show changing employment structures in Britain and explained the reasons for this. Lower-attaining pupils found difficulty in drawing graphs without guidance. In Key Stages 3 and 4, pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in relation to their individual targets.

130. All four pupils who took the A Level examination in 2000 passed and two gained A and B grades. In the previous three years attainment was below national averages, and the number of pupils taking A Level geography fell. It is now increasing. Pupils have good knowledge and understanding that they use skilfully in discussion. For example, in discussing river management they explain that straightening a river's course will increase its flow rate, and potential for flooding.

131. Teaching is greatly improved since the previous inspection and accounts for rising standards. Almost all teaching was consistently good. Planning, which takes account of previous learning, is good. Teachers make skilful use of questioning to check learning and identify weaknesses which need to be remedied. Teachers select resources well to develop geographical skills. For example, an aerial photograph and a sketch map challenged pupils to search for evidence to explain the development of a modern settlement. Teachers structure their lessons thoughtfully so the pace is lively, but still allows most pupils to have sufficient time to complete their work. In a few lessons, teachers do not give sufficient explanation or appropriate resources for lower attaining pupils, so their start on tasks is delayed by unnecessary dependence on the teacher. Similarly, higher attaining pupils occasionally finish tasks and no further work is available to extend their learning. Teachers are good at introducing subject vocabulary and expecting pupils to use these words with understanding in answers. However, the low level of literacy of a significant number of pupils adversely influences their learning. Work is marked regularly, often with helpful comments on ways to improve. Homework is well integrated within lesson planning. Good fieldwork supports class lessons, and GCSE and A Level coursework.

132. A new head of department, appointed since the last inspection, provides good leadership and management. Improved documentation and planning now supports the teaching of the National Curriculum and examination syllabi. Since September 2000, three full-time teachers provide a cohesive team committed to further raising standards in the subject.

HISTORY

133. Pupils enter the school with differing standards in history, but overall they are below expectations in knowledge, understanding and basic enquiry skills. By the end of Year 9, pupils' standards of attainment overall are in line with the average for similarly aged pupils nationally but a substantial minority of pupils are below average and few attain above. Teacher assessments in 2000 for pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 showed standards just above the national average for pupils at Level 5 or above, with no significant differences in boys' and girls' performance. At the end of Key Stage 3, teachers' assessments indicate that the proportion of pupils achieving the expected Level 5 is slightly above average but that the proportion reaching the higher Level 6 is below average. All pupils reinforce their understanding of chronology and make good progress in, for example, examining the value of

different types of evidence from various periods of history, and in developing their investigative and research skills, especially in Years 7 and 8. Lower attaining pupils, especially, find difficulty in the development of conceptual understanding and in the ability to relate cause to consequence. Throughout the key stage all pupils learn and use accurately an increasing range of historical terms. Those pupils who have special educational needs make good progress in developing their knowledge, understanding and basic skill levels.

134. The standards reached by Key Stage 4 pupils in the GCSE examination in 2000 was just above the national average for those gaining grades in the A* to C and A* to G ranges. The proportion achieving the higher grades has fluctuated over the period since the last inspection and, in some years, was below average. Inspection evidence shows that most pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve well in their knowledge and understanding of developments in, for instance, medicine and Nazi Germany. However, historical skills, such as the ability to analyse and evaluate sources of evidence, is better developed in current Year 10 work than that of Year 11.

135. The proportion of pupils achieving grades in the A to B and A to E ranges in the GCE Advanced Level examination in 2000 was below average. Pupils taking A Level History have, for the most part, modest grades at GCSE. However, by the end of the Sixth Form the majority of pupils have a sound level of knowledge and understanding of early English and of European history. Pupils' achievement in Year 12 is good and already most are reaching standards required in some of the course objectives. Pupils in Year 13, however, are still learning to distinguish between narrative and good analysis when doing extended written work.

136. Pupils have good attitudes to the subject, respond well to high expectations and show an increasingly mature approach to their work. Behaviour is very good and relationships, among pupils and with teachers, are highly productive. These very positive pupil attitudes contribute to raising standards and good progress in learning. As they move through the school, most pupils present their work well and all develop their literacy skills, especially in spelling and punctuation. Pupils increasingly have good opportunities to write at length and for a range of audiences. They use their understanding of chronology with skill as they deal with the complexities of historical events. Currently, pupils have few opportunities to use information and communication technology to support learning within the subject.

137. Overall, the quality of teaching in history is good and none was less than satisfactory. Teaching in four out of ten lessons was very good or excellent, in two out of ten it was good and in the remainder, satisfactory. Teaching has significantly improved since the last inspection. The good teaching was characterised by a number of features. Many lessons were carefully planned, had well-defined aims and objectives and a clear statement of what pupils should know, understand and be able to do as a result of the teaching. In well-planned lessons the learning was usually carefully sequenced, the teacher's expectations and challenge were high and teaching maintained a good pace throughout. For instance, in a Year 12 lesson pupils used a wide range of resources to explore possible priorities for William the Conqueror to establish his power in England, following his victory at Hastings. There was a high level of challenge and a demanding pace throughout the lesson. The outcomes showed good levels of skill in analysing and evaluating sources as well as a very good understanding of the sequence of historical events.

138. In a number of good lessons, skilful use was made of question and answer to involve pupils in the learning and to consolidate knowledge and develop understanding and skills. A Year 7 class, for instance, was challenged as they considered the geography of Rome and the reasons for expanding the empire. Many contributed from their previous learning, proposed hypotheses and faced challenges from their peers and teacher. The standard of oral and written work produced was of a good standard. The review of the lesson gave the pupils great satisfaction as they realised the extent of their learning. Where teaching was less successful in ensuring good achievement, it lacked pace and there was insufficient challenge. Occasionally opportunities were lost at the end of a lesson to check on the extent to which pupils had understood demanding concepts or gathered higher order analytical skills.

139. Teachers plan homework with care and ensure that it contributes to pupils' learning. Most class and homework assignments are carefully marked and comments help pupils to understand how well they have done and how the standard and quality of their work can be improved.

140. The history department is very well led and managed. The well-qualified and experienced teaching team has undertaken a considerable amount of work to improve both standards and the quality of provision in the subject. Teaching quality has improved since the last inspection and, more recently, schemes of work have been rewritten. These useful working documents now take full account of the content and skills of the revised National Curriculum requirements, the tasks and resources needed to support learning and the assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of the teaching and the levels of attainment reached by each pupil. Accommodation is of good quality and the provision of resources is satisfactory. Some aspects of learning at Key Stage 3 would, however, be further enriched by a wider range of texts, artefacts and other materials, including the use of information and communication technology.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

141. The attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3, as assessed by the school in 2000, is well above national expectations. The inspection found that, across all areas of information and communications technology, pupils are generally working at levels above those expected for pupils of this age. In areas such as desktop publishing and the use of databases, all but a small number of pupils are working at National Curriculum Levels 5 or 6 and some higher attainers at Level 7. The school's GCSE results in the Information Technology examination are very high compared with schools nationally. The standards of information technology at the end of Key Stage 4 are above national expectations. Pupils make use of knowledge, skills and understanding gained earlier in the school to enhance their learning across a range of subjects such as geography, music and art. At Sixth Form level, pupils continue to exercise and develop these skills in the two new one-year courses: the vocational course and the AS Level course. The standards are above average in each case. The current two-year A Level computing course, which is being phased out, has achieved an average pass rate over the last few years. Pupils in this, the final year, also show attainment that is average at this stage.

142. Standards have continued to rise at both key stages since the last inspection, when they were average. This is despite the fact that the standards of attainment on entry have been falling. Pupils begin Year 7 with below average attainment in information and communication technology and make very good progress. Pupils with special educational needs also make good progress. This high level of achievement is due to the quality of the teaching, the motivation and enthusiasm of the pupils, the open access which the pupils have to facilities and the way that the department reflects the school's aims and values. Pupils work hard in information and communication technology, both in and out of the classroom. They show a mature and responsible attitude to the equipment and relationships and behaviour are good.

143. Teaching is never less than satisfactory at all levels. The majority of the teaching is good and sometimes very good. Lessons are orderly and disciplined and pupils respond well to the routines that the teachers establish early on. There is a consistency of approach that involves pupils taking a responsibility for their own learning, from Year 7 onwards. Pupils must save their own work, print out the results and are taught how to evaluate their work from clear criteria. In this way, they know how well they are progressing and what they must do to improve. In the best lessons, the teacher provides a clear introduction, testing what the pupils know with carefully directed questions and giving detailed instructions for the next stage. This enables pupils with different levels of attainment to get down to work with the minimum of fuss. In one such lesson in Year 7, the teacher had organised a very challenging lesson on the use of a database. Pupils made very good progress. The higher-attaining pupils learned how to make complex searches in answer to questions set by the teacher. Many pupils were able to progress on their own initiative, because they applied knowledge and skills they had learned earlier. The teacher's very good management and control meant that none of the pupils were stuck for very long and the slower pupils were given extra help and support. In all lessons, teachers provide appropriate support to the pupils who work to individual education plans, provided by the learning support department and this enables them to make good progress. In less successful lessons, the teacher does not always take into account these differing needs and as a result the lower-attaining pupils make less progress. Nevertheless, the teachers' expectations are high, particularly at Key Stage 3. Even in the good lessons, the opportunities that the teachers ought to provide for pupils to develop their vocabulary through speaking and listening are not always evident, with teachers sometimes answering their own questions. Although pupils use a spellchecker as a matter of course, not many pupils can use the tool effectively.

144. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The co-ordinator for information and communication technology has a thorough knowledge and understanding of the different requirements at each Key Stage. Through careful monitoring of the teaching and learning, along with analysis of the test and examination results, his revisions to the content and delivery of the curriculum have proved effective in raising standards, particularly at Key Stage 3. The Year 9 scheme, for instance, is modelled on the approach taken in the new GCSE exam and has proved useful in the transition between the two stages. The level of cross-curricular information and communication technology has also improved, so that pupils are now likely to use it, at some stage, in nearly all the National Curriculum subjects. The use of information and communication technology is particularly strong in mathematics, geography and art. Some departments, such as design technology, music and mathematics, would make more use if they had more access to a computer suite. Others, such as science, history and modern foreign languages make less use than they could. Control technology is covered only by the information and communication technology department.

Plans to build a new computer room and expand the equipment for control technology are well under way. The school's connections to the Internet, along with its own 'Intranet' are heavily used. In one lesson, in Year 9, pupils were able to compare their own designs for a World Wide Web page with live material from the 'Web'. At lunchtime and after school, all the available computers, including those in the library, are regularly occupied by pupils of all ages with homework, research and, just as importantly, recreation. This adds to the overall interest and enthusiasm, as well as providing opportunities for those who do not have access to a computer at home.

145. The newly introduced Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education course in Year 12 is popular because it offers an alternative to AS Level. It attracts pupils who have done well in their GCSE exams and want a more vocational course. Extra tuition is also given to some pupils in Year 9 who are taking a GNVQ foundation course. Pupils may opt for this or the school will select them in consultation with the pupils themselves and their parents. These courses are part of the school's drive to offer a broader range of options to cater for a greater range of needs. They add to the good improvement that the school has made since the last inspection.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

146. Curricular provision and standards of attainment in languages have improved since the last inspection. All pupils study one European language, French or German, in Years 7 to 9. Currently, their attainment is in line with national expectations and corresponds to the results obtained in the most recent teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3.

147. In the GCSE examinations in French in 2000, the proportion of pupils achieving grades A* to C was well below the national average, though higher than in the previous year. Girls attained grades in line with the national average, but the results were depressed by a poor performance by boys. All pupils entering gained grades in the A* to G range. Results overall were lower than those obtained in other subjects. In the same year the proportion of pupils gaining grades A* to C in German was also below average and below that of the previous year, when the results were better than average. Girls attained higher than average grades in 2000, although boys' results were well below average. All pupils entering for German gained grades at A* to G.

148. In the last two years, the majority of pupils entering for French and German at A Level achieved passes in the A to E range, with a minority gaining the higher grades A and B.

149. After one term of study, pupils can follow and understand lessons taught entirely or substantially in the foreign language. They can extract details from taped statements and short conversations. They ask and answer questions and express simple opinions about everyday matters such as families and personal possessions. Pupils learn to write in different styles ranging from short, jotted answers to informal letters to teenagers overseas. By the age of fourteen, many pupils acquire sufficient vocabulary to converse and write about school and leisure pursuits, and most can confidently act out short simulations such as a visit to the

doctor. Higher-attaining pupils can plan and organise their own work as individuals or in pairs. They use dictionaries and other sources to read authentic texts about diet or write a diary of spare time activities. Lower attainers, and some pupils with special educational needs, read short descriptive passages and use written prompts to conduct simple conversations.

150. Most pupils continue with the same language in Years 10 and 11, acquiring the skills and knowledge they require for GCSE. Higher-attaining pupils acquire good insight into grammar and use different tenses to refer to the past and the future. They develop their ideas more fully, giving reasons for their opinions, or describing the fun and disappointments of a school holiday abroad. The quality of most pupils' written work is good in German, although many boys continue to speak and write less fluently and accurately in French. Most pupils adapt their acquired language to various real purposes, such as completing a questionnaire about personality or enquiring about lost property. A minority of lower attainers including pupils with special educational needs make a fresh start in German or Spanish, learning the basic language needed for living or travelling abroad. Those that persevere with French benefit from the extra support and individual attention they receive in small groups, and achieve well in consequence.

151. A few Sixth Form pupils currently study German to A or AS Level, working in close co-operation with their teachers in a small group. Most manage to build on their previous learning, although a minority find the work hard and make insufficient progress. Those who methodically improve their vocabulary and gain sufficient insight into German grammar are able to speak and write on subjects of moral and social import, ranging from equality of the sexes to environmental issues. The pupils have a limited level of fluency overall and are slow to interpret authentic texts. The modest quality of some written work reflects a lack of enriching experiences and insufficient contact with real people abroad.

152. The quality of teaching is never less than satisfactory. The majority of teaching is good and a minority is very good. Teachers have good subject knowledge. They are mostly fluent, articulate and familiar with the requirements of the examination boards. A small amount of non-specialist teaching is competently done. Teachers relate well to their pupils, often generating a busy good-natured atmosphere in class. They usually plan their lessons well, to include brisk and balanced coverage of the four language learning skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Pupils enjoy listening to their classmates talk about going out for the evening or visiting the doctor. Pupils of all ages and abilities, including some with special educational needs, learn particularly well when the teacher uses the new language for real purposes such as a game, singing a song or conducting a conversation. When the teacher's presentation goes on too long, a few pupils lose interest and achieve less as a result.

153. Teachers' expectations of pupils are mostly high. In all three languages, they make substantial demands of higher attainers, who react positively and achieve well. They give encouragement and support to the least able linguists, keeping most of them involved and productive. Teachers often make good use of specially prepared materials that allow pupils

to work independently. They are, however, insufficiently rigorous in their use of data obtainable in school for setting targets, in particular for middle attainers in French. Too many of these pupils fall below the benchmark C grade in the GCSE. Teachers make good use of homework to prepare and follow up lessons. They make limited use of information and communications technology in school but do encourage pupils to use their own computers or those in the library for research and to present their work attractively.

154. The department is well led and managed. Teachers have worked hard since the last inspection to maintain standards while extending a more varied curriculum to a wider range of pupils. They have created a supportive learning environment in the language suite and have enriched pupils' learning by organising study holidays abroad. The department has regained its stability after recently suffering some inconsistency and lack of continuity in the teaching of French. The quality of teaching has improved through the direct observation of lessons and the sharing of best practice. The poor motivation and low attainment of boys in exam classes requires urgent attention, and the much better standards achieved by younger pupils must be encouraged and sustained. More accurate analysis of pupils' abilities and potential for success can be achieved by reference to the available assessment data. Sixth Form language studies will appeal to a greater number of pupils if a more stimulating curriculum is offered. More widespread and frequent use of information and communications technology will add an important realistic dimension to the department's work.

MUSIC

155. Teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2000 indicate a steady improvement in the number of pupils achieving standards in line with national expectations. GCSE results in music have improved significantly since the last report and although there was a dip in 2000 they were still just above the national average for pupils achieving grades A* to C. At A Level, the number of entries is too small to make comparisons with national averages or to draw any valid conclusions on trends, but of the four pupils entered in the last two years three gained passes at grades B to D.

156. At Key Stage 3, standards of attainment are close to national expectations. By the end of the Key Stage pupils are familiar with staff and graphic notation and identify notes on a staff and relate them to the keyboard. The pupils' compositions show a good level of creativity, they are inventive and create interesting sound textures. For example, four boys in a Year 9 class composed a piece for trumpet, tambourine and piano. Lower-attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs are achieving standards close to national expectations but higher attaining pupils could sometimes achieve more if set more demanding tasks. At Key Stage 4, standards are in line with national expectations. Pupils produce effective compositions in varied styles ranging from two-part counterpoint to the use of layered textures in an electronic soundtrack. Instrumental performance is similarly varied, with some pupils achieving high standards where their work is supported by specialist instrumental teaching. Ensemble skills are good both in extra-curricular groups and in class work. The standard of appraising and listening skills is satisfactory but pupils are reluctant to use technical vocabulary even though they show understanding of it. As in Key Stage 3, there are no significant differences in the performance of boys and girls, and pupils of all levels of prior attainment achieve well. There are very few pupils taking music in the Sixth Form. Lessons seen and scrutiny of pupils' work indicates standards of attainment in line with national expectations. Performance

standards are good, both individually and in ensemble, but melodic composition is weak structurally, although often inventive. The pupils show good knowledge of technical vocabulary when prompted, but are not confident enough to relate that vocabulary to what they are hearing. Overall attainment is close to national expectations, and taking into account the standards of pupils' attainment on entry to the school, the level of achievement is good.

157. The quality of teaching and learning is very good in approximately two thirds of lessons and good in one third. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen. The quality of teaching and learning at Key Stage 3 is good. All staff are well qualified and plan their lessons well, with effective use of time and resources. Explicit objectives are set with clear explanations. Good questioning techniques are used which make the pupils draw on their previous knowledge and relate it to the work they are doing. The management of pupils is consistently good and this results in good standards of behaviour at Key Stage 3 and very good standards at Key Stage 4 and Sixth Form. Pupils are able to concentrate well and this is a strength in the independent work and group work, where the pupils apply themselves well, often without direct supervision by the teacher. The good individual teaching given to pupils with special educational needs and the use of tasks which allow pupils to perform at different levels, help them to make good progress. However, sometimes more challenging tasks could be set to stretch higher-attaining pupils. At Key Stage 4, and at Sixth Form level, the quality of teaching and learning is very good. All the strengths noted in the teaching at Key Stage 3 apply but in addition the smaller numbers allow for much more individual attention and setting of appropriate tasks. For example, in a Year 11 composition class, every pupil was given an individual target related to their previous composition. Instrumental teaching is provided by the Gloucestershire Music Service and is of good quality.

158. The curriculum is well balanced and fulfils National Curriculum requirements. The department uses new technology effectively as far as its resources allow. There is a need for more computers within the department to provide more opportunity for pupils to use them in their composing. The department offers a good range of extra-curricular activities and instrumental tuition. The take-up for the latter is above the national average. Since the last inspection the quality of teaching has improved, the percentage of higher grade GCSE passes has increased and the use of new technology has been developed. The head of department provides strong leadership, he has a clear vision of the educational direction he wants the department to take and has established appropriate priorities. All staff are committed and have the capacity to improve the subject. The department makes a strong contribution to the culture and ethos of the school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

159. On entry to the school, attainment in physical education is below the national expectation. Pupils have little experience of dance, basketball, rugby and fitness activities. By the end of Year 9, the attainment of the majority of pupils meets national expectations and a minority of boys attain above this level. Good teaching, based on progressive units of work, is responsible for the good progress made by all pupils. Teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 reflect these findings. By the end of Year 9, pupils have a good knowledge of fitness and can warm up and stretch independently and effectively. When playing rugby the

majority of boys pass accurately and use their speed and agility to beat defenders. The girls in Year 9 are supportive of one another and work co-operatively to link actions into complex sequences but a few girls lack body tension and rhythm in their movements.

160. Attainment in physical education in GCSE in 2000 was well below the national average for the proportion of pupils achieving grades A* to C. The 1999 results were better than those achieved in 2000 but remained below the national average. The standard of work seen in GCSE classes during the inspection was in line with the national average. Pupils' written work is well presented. They make clear concise notes from a variety of sources. Weaker literacy skills adversely affect the progress of a few pupils in the theoretical aspects. In practical lessons, pupils are developing perceptive evaluative skills, for example when analysing the technique of throwing events. In the Key Stage 4 statutory lessons, the majority of pupils attain in line with national expectations. Those studying for their Junior Sports Leaders award lead and organise activities for others in a safe and confident manner. Lack of motivation among a few girls in aerobics negatively affects their progress.

161. One of the five pupils entered for A Level in 2000 achieved an A grade. The remaining four pupils all passed the examination. The attainment of the majority of pupils in Years 12 and 13 is in line with expectations. Pupils have a good general vocabulary, use appropriate technical terminology and pay attention to detail but they do not give sufficient exemplars in their written answers.

162. The attainment of some individual pupils and teams is very high. They play football, netball, rugby, and athletics for district and county teams. One boy play for the national rugby team and another for the national soccer team. One girl plays for the county rugby team and one girl for the county netball team.

163. The quality of teaching overall is good and has improved since the previous inspection. Teaching was very good in almost half the lessons seen. Learning is good across the attainment range at both key stages and in the Sixth Form. The one unsatisfactory lesson seen during the inspection included some unsafe practice and there was a lack of appropriate pace and challenge. Because of the very good subject expertise of their teachers, pupils in Years 7 and 8 quickly acquire the new skills involved in rugby and basketball and increase their understanding of these games. Pupils in Years 8 and 9 are organised into groups on the basis of prior attainment and this means that groups of more able pupils make good progress, as do the groups of lower-attaining pupils. Those with physical disabilities are well supported in practical lessons by their teachers and by the caring attitude of other pupils in the group. All teachers review previous work and share the lesson objectives at the beginning of the lesson with the pupils. This is a particularly successful strategy with the lower-attaining groups, who often need to refine and revisit existing skills before progress can be made.

164. All lessons include a health and fitness section in the form of a warm up and stretching section and the very good lessons give pupils the opportunities to acquire new skills, to select and apply these skills and to evaluate their own work and that of others. The very short, 50 minute lesson makes it difficult for teachers to manage a good balance between all these strands of the National Curriculum. However, the teaching of the same activity in single gender groups in their twice weekly physical education lessons at Key Stage 3 does promote continuity in pupils' learning. GCSE and A

Level notebooks are marked regularly with

informative and constructive comments, and provide an effective learning resource for pupils. However, the department does not consistently focus on literacy skills. Key words are not always displayed in practical lessons. More emphasis on technical vocabulary, spelling and reading skills at Key Stage 3 would provide a base for the theoretical aspects of the GCSE examination. Information and communication technology is not used sufficiently.

165. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good. This, together with the pupils' good behaviour and enthusiasm for the subject, enables their learning to be most effective. Only pupils with medical reasons do not regularly participate and strategies to involve them are consistently applied by their teachers. Twenty percent of pupils, more boys than girls, opt to study GCSE physical education. Large numbers of pupils attend a range of extra-curricular activities including clubs, practices, inter-tutor group and inter-school competitions which provide equally for boys and girls.

166. Clearly defined health, safety and risk assessment procedures are part of the comprehensive department documentation, but in one lesson risk assessment was not carried out fully at the start of the lesson. The indoor and outdoor facilities are good and resources are sufficient but a dedicated room to teach the theoretical aspects of GCSE and A Level would allow teachers to use audio visual and information technology more frequently. Assessment procedures reflect the new national curriculum levels but are not yet linked to the units of work and pupils are not fully aware of the activity criteria. Pass booklets are used to provide opportunities for pupils to assess their own work and could be further developed as a pupil and teacher partnership, once the criteria are established. The management and personnel of the department have changed significantly since the previous inspection and the head of department provides very good leadership. Teaching is regularly monitored and the new teachers to the department have been well supported. Since the previous inspection, good progress has been made in developing community links, the quality of teaching has improved and pupils are now making consistently good progress.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

167. Overall, pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 matches the expectations of the Local Agreed Syllabus, although the standards reached by Year 7 and 8 are higher. The reduction of teaching time in Year 9 limits the opportunity for pupils to continue to make good progress. There is limited time to develop conceptual thinking and to continually reinforce understanding. Good planning by the teachers enables pupils to cover the Agreed Syllabus but not to be very well prepared for GCSE work in Key Stage 4. There is little evidence, for example, of in-depth consideration of questions about the meaning of life.

168. The issue of limited time continues at Key Stage 4, where a short GCSE course has been introduced and is taught to all pupils during one lesson a week. The pupils cover the syllabus as a result of very good management. Teachers work very hard to produce stimulating teaching materials that focus on the essence of what the pupils are required to know and understand. However, time for discussion and the honing of communication skills is limited. Attainment is satisfactory but not good. This is regrettable, as pupils are capable

of reaching the higher grades as the results of the full GCSE exams in religious education show. In 2000 more than two thirds of a small group achieved a grade A* to C, a result which is above the national average. The number of top grades was well above. These results are similar to those of earlier years.

169. There is no teaching of religious education in the Sixth Form and statutory requirements are not met. The department is trying hard to interest the current Year 11 into taking an AS or A Level course in the Sixth Form.

170. In general, pupils in Key Stage 3 classes achieve well. Teachers carefully review previous learning and use questions and answers effectively to highlight new knowledge and ideas. Good classroom management ensures that the majority participate. Years 7 and 8 classes benefit from discussions that reinforce learning. Basic facts are taught formally. Pupils learn easily. For example a Year 7 class could talk knowledgeably about the many events that occur within a church.

171. Work seen in Year 7 and 8 books indicates a brisk pace of learning. Well written schemes of work ensure the systematic delivery of new facts and ideas, each linked to what has just been learnt. There are ample opportunities to think and write about what they have been taught. There were some good eyewitness accounts of The Crucifixion. Pupils reflect and produce well considered personal creeds. By the end of Year 9 pupils know about the distinctive features of Hinduism, Sikhism, Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Belief and practice within the Christian Church has been explored.

172. Good learning occurs in Key Stage 4 lessons, reflecting the quality of the teaching. First rate teaching materials are produced that highlight key words and ideas. Very good references are made to current affairs in order to make the subject relevant and interesting. Teachers use a wide range of teaching and learning styles to motivate pupils. A Year 11 class with many pupils with special needs was engaged in a range of practical activities designed to reinforce learning about the purpose of a Christian marriage.

173. Scrutiny of pupils' work over time indicates that there is too little time to reinforce and extend this work. There is little evidence of in-depth investigation and response to a range of fundamental questions about life and religion. Teachers are aware that many pupils find it difficult to write fluently and quickly, and work hard to improve the pupils' literacy skills by, for example, insisting on a structured approach to presenting an argument. By the end of the key stage, achievement is satisfactory.

174. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. In Key Stage 4 the majority of teaching is very good or better. There were no examples of unsatisfactory teaching. This has a positive impact on pupils' attitudes to learning and the progress made. Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and a great enthusiasm for it. Very efficient planning and co-ordination, together with the careful preparation of lessons, enables teachers to be effective. Pupils respond well to the excellent worksheets that the teachers prepare, and relationships within the classroom are generally good.

175. There are a few shortcomings. There is insufficient emphasis on producing a range of tasks

and teaching materials that meets the needs of all pupils. There are too few extension tasks to challenge the more able and the language used in some of the worksheets is too difficult for some pupils. Whilst the assessment of pupils' work is good it could be better. Pupils' work is assessed against agreed criteria but these are not sufficiently related to details about what the pupils should know and understand for each particular topic. Pupils are not always meaningfully informed of what they need to do in order to reach the next level.

176. The leadership and management of the department are good. There is a sense of purpose and clear educational direction. Initiatives are implemented effectively. There was no examination course available for all pupils at the time of the last report. The school has made good progress in this area, as it has in raising achievement in Years 7 and 8. The department needs to improve its use of information and communication technology. The department continues to make very good provision for spiritual and moral education and offers good opportunities for social and cultural development. There is a well considered action plan, although the importance of raising academic performance needs to be highlighted as a prime target.

VOCATIONAL COURSES

177. The GCSE Business Studies and Office Applications results are above national expectations. The Business Studies GCSE results have, for all but one year since the previous inspection, been well above national expectations. In 2000, results were significantly better than national averages, and better than those in 1999, which were below. The pupils taking the GCSE Office Applications course have consistently attained results above national averages. Generally girls attain better results than boys. The trend in results is one of steady improvement. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and often overcome difficulties to attain better results than anticipated. Pupils' well-developed skills in using information technology significantly enhance their GCSE Business Studies and GCSE Office Applications results. Pupils who take RSA examinations attain very good grades in both word and text processing. The majority of pupils therefore make good progress and benefit from the opportunities to study these subjects which broaden their horizons of the world of work. The department has consistently attained better results than other departments in the school.

178. The pupils who take GCE Advanced Level in Business Studies have generally gained results in line with national expectations. Since the previous inspection, nine out of ten pupils have usually gained an A to E grade. In 2000, however, the Advanced Level candidates performed less well with approximately two thirds of the candidates gaining A to E grades. The A Level pupils make good progress and many build on the good work that they completed in GCSE classes. A good number of pupils take up further study related to their business studies courses in higher education. Boys and girls perform equally well.

179. The pupils taking the GNVQ programmes achieve results a little lower than those anticipated. Whilst nearly all pupils gain some unit accreditation, there have been relatively few pupils gaining pass, merit and distinction awards at the end of their courses. In 2000, one pupil gained a distinction in the Leisure and Tourism Intermediate award and two pupils gained distinctions in the Advanced award. One pupil gained a pass award in Leisure and Tourism at Foundation level. Two pupils gain distinction awards in Health and Social Care Advanced and one gained a pass award in

Health and Social Care Intermediate. Three pupils

who did not complete their programmes by the end of the summer term are pursuing accreditation. In 1999, a better year than 2000 for results, twelve pupils gained awards covering all three levels. The few pupils with special educational needs who take up GNVQ courses make satisfactory progress.

180. The attitudes of pupils to both Business Studies and GNVQ courses have been good and predominantly positive. The high uptake of pupils choosing business studies indicates that pupils have a desire and an interest to learn. Teachers of GNVQ and Business Studies have established good working relationships with their pupils and have successfully found teaching methods and styles which have engaged, interested and motivated their pupils. Teachers of GNVQ have ensured that the key skills of communication, the application of number and information technology have been introduced in a relevant way and the pupils have benefited from this broadening of their education. Pupils have responded in Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form to opportunities for work experience and spoken of their placements very positively. Pupils have enjoyed working with others and solving various problems together. In the Sixth Form, GNVQ pupils have benefited from work placements in companies that operate in the health, leisure, social care and recreation sectors, and the many visits to places as diverse as The National Waterways Museum, The Cotswold Leisure Centre and the pathology laboratory in The Gloucester Royal Hospital. Sixth Formers in GNVQ classes have appreciated the seminar approach to many lessons and appreciate the access to the staff for additional support and advice. Business Studies pupils appreciate the opportunities to work in teams and to come up with business solutions to everyday business problems. Some GNVQ pupils find it challenging to adapt to the alternative approaches to teaching and learning that courses present. Some pupils find time management challenging.

181. Teaching of business studies and GNVQ programmes is good overall. All teachers of business studies are well qualified and very experienced and know the syllabuses through and through. Their work is very well planned and the management of pupils is very effective. They have developed the art of treating older pupils with sensitivity, yet maintaining a rigorous and demanding pace of work. The teachers' high expectations are clearly conveyed to their pupils. In one very successful lesson the teacher provided the A Level pupils with contemporary examples of government aid to the car industry and meticulously worked through with the pupils all the possible reasons for such aid. Business Studies teachers have found a good balance of didactic teaching and problem-solving activities. They set meaningful homework that reinforces and extends pupils' knowledge. The many GNVQ teachers have a variety of approaches and also teach well. In the best lessons, pupils were encouraged to think for themselves and to reflect on their group findings and to present these findings to their class. In a well managed Leisure and Recreation lesson, the teacher helped pupils to assess the advantages and disadvantages of seasonal work, to compare and contrast job descriptions and to design job descriptions and person specifications. In another well-structured Health and Social Care lesson, the teacher provided the pupils with first rate information about the National Health Service. Some of the pupils have already decided to apply for training when they leave school to become occupational therapists, counsellors, nurses and social workers. The teachers set their pupils the prescribed assignments and assess them accurately. Some pupils struggle to present their work on time and some, predominantly but not exclusively at Foundation and Intermediate Level, fall behind because they can not manage this aspect of their work well.

182. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form is much enhanced with Business Studies and GNVQ courses. Pupils are given a variety of courses at different academic levels. The breadth, balance and relevance of the curriculum is good. Both business and GNVQ courses make a good contribution to pupils' personal development and extend and expand pupils' knowledge of the business community and the wider world of work. The school has kept fully up to date with the new AS and Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education.

183. The Key Stage 4 non-accredited course for lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs, makes an important and valuable contribution to pupils' education. The standards of the pupils' work are higher than expected. The pupils work very well together and speak very positively of their time in the group. Many of the pupils gain immensely in personal esteem, confidence and motivation. All pupils appreciate the security and positive work ethos that permeates the group. The course is very well organised, managed, delivered and taught by two very capable and committed teachers. It is a relevant and practically based course that appeals to the interests and motivation of the pupils. The recent introduction of industrialist mentors significantly enhances the lessons. The course programme and the pupils' course work are carefully monitored and pupils build up a comprehensive portfolio of their personal and academic achievements.

184. The leadership and management of the Business Studies department are very good. There is a positive sense of purpose and direction that permeates the planning, monitoring and teaching. Good quality monitoring of pupils' attainment and progress has enhanced results. The subject makes a very positive contribution to the school's life and work. The management of the GNVQ programmes is satisfactory, as is the monitoring and evaluation of the course programmes. With the recent development of transferring the co-ordination of GNVQ to subject departments, it is intended that the in-depth monitoring of pupils' progress will become more rigorous and systematic. The academic tutoring, counselling and monitoring currently lack the impact that would keep all pupils on task, on track, and fully up to date with all their work. Both the Business and GNVQ 'departments' make good use of information technology and both are in a good position to build on the work already started. Much has been achieved and there is still potential for enhancement.