

# INSPECTION REPORT

## THE MOSSLANDS SCHOOL

Wallasey

LEA area: Wirral

Unique Reference Number: 105103

Headteacher: Mr G A Fair

Reporting inspector: Dr D A W Biltcliffe  
1025

Dates of inspection: 8<sup>th</sup> -11<sup>th</sup> January 2001

Inspection number: 189447

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Boys 11-16 Mixed 16-18
School address:	Mosslands Drive Wallasey Wirral CH45 8PJ
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr J Hassall
Dates of previous inspection:	16 <sup>th</sup> - 20 <sup>th</sup> September 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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9034	Mrs J W Biltcliffe	Lay inspector		Attendance
13452	Mr H Meggitt	Lay inspector		Partnership with parents
5038	Mr H Heller	Team inspector	Special educational needs	Pupils' attitudes and values; school's care for pupils; leadership and management
11479	Mr J A Paine	Team inspector	English; drama	
1262	Mr R Heath	Team inspector	Mathematics	
4607	Dr D E Ward	Team inspector	Science	
31129	Mr J Pickering	Team inspector	Art	
11190	Mrs W M Burke	Team inspector	Design and technology; information and communication technology	
12470	Mr B M Greasley	Team inspector	Geography	Curriculum
8873	Ms C Evers	Team inspector	History	Efficiency / staffing, accommodation and learning resources
4829	Mr I H C Waters	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
8645	Dr J D Ward	Team inspector	Music	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; assessment
13217	Mr M D Butterworth	Team inspector	Physical education	
18673	Mr R C Wilkins	Team inspector	Religious education	
1819	Mr R H Crowther	Team inspector	Vocational education	

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

This comprehensive school is much larger than average. It currently has 1478 pupils aged 11-18: it educates boys only up to the age of 16, but has 17 girls in the sixth form alongside 204 boys. The overall social and economic background of pupils is broadly average. The overall attainment of pupils on entry to the school at age 11, drawn from about 30 primary schools, is close to the national average. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is about average, but the proportion with statements is double the national average. Twenty-five pupils come from families of ethnic minority heritage. There are 16 pupils with English as an additional language, but only one is at an early stage of learning English.

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

The Mosslands is an effective school that provides a good standard of education for its pupils. It has many strengths and few weaknesses. Pupils' overall standard of attainment is in line with the national average at the end of Year 11 and close to average in the sixth form. The quality of teaching and learning are good overall. The school is very well led and its management generally effective. It provides good value for money.

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

- This school performs better overall than most schools of a similar kind. Most of its provision works well.
- Mathematics, science, design and technology, and history are stronger subjects.
- The quality of teaching is good overall and better than in 1996: in particular, boys are well managed in class.
- Pupils' attitudes, behaviour, relationships and personal development are generally good and often very good.
- The school offers a wide and relevant curriculum, particularly in Years 10-11.
- It makes substantial provision for pupils' moral and social education and for extracurricular activities.

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

- The formal monitoring and evaluation of all teaching and the over-directiveness of too much of the teaching.
- The production and effective implementation of whole-school policies for language and numeracy.
- The analysis of both individual pupils' and the whole school's performance in Years 7-9.
- Pupils' overall attainment and progress in English and geography.
- The amount of progress through an increase in the length of the taught week and of thirty-five minute lessons.
- Provision for religious education in Years 10-13, pupils' spiritual development and daily collective worship.

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

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

The school has improved to at least a satisfactory level most of the weaknesses identified in 1996. For example:

- it has clear aims, firm planning, good management and sound monitoring of most of its work;
- the school's curriculum now meets statutory requirements for art, music and drama;

- its provision for pupils' cultural development is satisfactory overall (although it could be wider);
- accommodation is now on one site: much has been significantly improved and more is in the pipeline;
- the provision of books is now satisfactory overall, although more are needed.

Insufficient progress has, however, been made in improving the school's assessment, recording and reporting policy. Importantly, the school is far from meeting the statutory requirement to teach religious education (RE) in Years 10-11 and has done very little since 1996 to attempt to do so. This remains a serious deficiency.

Pupils' overall standard of attainment in GCSE examinations is broadly similar to what it was at the last inspection. Achievement at GCE Advanced (A) level improved from 1996 to 1999, but dropped in 2000 to below average. The school's teaching has improved: the amount of unsatisfactory teaching has declined substantially from eleven to two per cent. Overall, since 1996 the school has made generally sound progress in improving its practice. With the exception of the substantial gap in RE teaching, its governors and senior management are committed to a policy of sustained improvement in the school.

## STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with			
	all schools			Similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	D	C	C	A
A-levels/AS-levels	C	A	C	

**Key**

*Well above average*    A

*Above average*        B

*Average*                 C

*Below average*         D

*Well below average*    E

The school's results in the national tests for 14 year olds in 2000 were below average in English, above average in mathematics and well above average in science. The 2000 results were well above average for schools of a similar kind (as measured only by the proportion of pupils eligible to free school meals) - average in English, but very high in mathematics and science. Standards rose over the 1996-1999 period, broadly in line with the rise nationally, but dipped a little in 2000. By the end of Year 9 standards in the school are average in most subjects. They are above average in science and history, but below average in RE. Pupils generally make sound progress in their studies from Year 7 to Year 9.

Results in GCSE were around the national average in 2000 on most measures. They were close to the national average over the 1997-2000 period for the proportion of pupils achieving at least five grades A\*-C, but below average for five or more grades A\*-G. In both 1999 and 2000 the overall achievement in GCSE was well above the group average for schools of a similar character. The strongest subjects in GCSE in most years between 1996-2000 were mathematics, science, and design and technology. English and geography were weaker subjects. Most pupils make satisfactory progress between the ends of Year 9 and Year 11. Pupils with special educational needs generally make sound progress.

In the sixth form, achievement has been slightly below average over the last few years (except for an average performance in 1999) both for the quality of grades obtained and the pass rate. The addition of general studies as a fourth A-level, however, lifts the rating for points scored to an average level in most years. On General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) courses in 2000, achievement was close to, but a little below, average.



## PUPILS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Generally good and often very good.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good overall. Most pupils show respect for other people, the buildings and other property. A few are impulsive.
Personal development and relationships	The school achieves well here through patient firmness. A good sense of community: most pupils are responsible.
Attendance	Good by most pupils, but poor for a few: satisfactory overall.

These elements, coupled with the fact that in a school of this size and type there were no permanent exclusions last year, represent a considerable achievement and are strengths of the school.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
In the lessons seen overall	good	good	good

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

Teaching was at least satisfactory in 98 per cent of lessons, good in 39 per cent and very good (or better) in 16 per cent of those seen. Just two per cent of lessons had unsatisfactory (but no poor) teaching. In well-taught lessons pupils make good progress through suitably demanding work, a brisk pace and firm management. Unsatisfactory teaching is characterised by not enough rigour and too much teacher talk. Teaching is sound overall in English. It is good in mathematics, as it is in most departments. Most pupils listen carefully and learn with interest.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Apart from insufficient RE, the curriculum is broad and well balanced: innovative courses in Years 10-11 and good subject spread in the sixth.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Generally sound: the combination of small lower sets, special unit provision and specialist teaching meets most needs well.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	These are good overall. Moral and social education are the strongest features and, with satisfactory cultural provision, receive well-planned and effective attention. Pupils' spiritual development lags well behind and is unsatisfactory - as it was at the last inspection.
How well the school cares for its pupils	A high priority for all staff and effectively promoted through the House system. A high level of care is given to pupils.

Most curricular planning is careful and effective, but that for RE beyond Year 9 is a serious omission. The 35-minute lessons are too short. A very wide range of extracurricular activities (with especial strengths in music and sport) is provided and appreciated. Parents value the school. Most home-school links are strong, but parents receive insufficient information about the curriculum in Years 7-9 and reports are not clear enough. The improved assessment of pupils' work since 1996 requires still more reliability in Years 7-9.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Leadership & management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides very good, effective and visible leadership. Most senior and middle managers are effective. The school's amalgamation on one site has been carried out smoothly.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body is businesslike, supportive and committed. It has a suitable system for receiving information, but not for performance reviews.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good progress has been made overall since 1996: the basic structure is sound, but the academic analysis in Years 7-9 has gaps.
The strategic use of resources	Its financial planning, management and monitoring are strong. Its buildings are much improved and more improvements are on the way.

The provision of specialist teaching and technical staff is good. Administrative staffing is very efficient, though below average in amount. Accommodation for science, music, physical education and the sixth form is much improved, but further improvements are firmly planned or needed. Waterlogged pitches are a major handicap. The provision of learning resources is good overall, but there are still shortages of books and equipment. The new, small library is set to be enlarged to an adequate size.

## **PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

<b>What pleases parents most</b>	<b>What parents would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school's high expectations and pupils' achievements and progress.</li> <li>• Its approachability and its strong leadership and management.</li> <li>• The good quality of teaching.</li> <li>• The high quality of pastoral care.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The closeness of the working relationship between school and parents.</li> <li>• Some feel that they are not well enough informed about their children's progress.</li> </ul>

Inspectors' judgements support the positive views that parents express. The school generally enables most pupils to make suitable progress. The quality of teaching is good overall. Pupils feel confident in the pastoral care and supervision they receive. The school has the normal range of ways to sustain close, effective contacts with parents. Inspectors agree, however, that the school does not provide enough precise information about pupils' attainments and progress. Overall, however, parents and the wider community rightly have a favourable and supportive view of the school.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

1. The overall standard of attainment of pupils in the school is in line with that expected nationally of pupils at the ends of both Key Stage 3 (Year 9) and Key Stage 4 (Year 11). Pupils' overall achievement is a little above average in the national tests in Year 9, average (on most measures) in GCSE examinations and broadly typical of national standards at GCE Advanced (A) level. Since the last inspection of 1996, the level of attainment in the Year 9 national tests has risen in line with the rise nationally and has remained fairly stable at GCSE. At GCE A-level, pupils' attainment rose steadily over the 1996-1999 period, but dropped back in 2000 to about the school's 1997 level.

2. On entry to the school in Year 7, pupils' attainments vary widely, but their overall level is close to (although in most years very slightly above) average. The incomplete evidence available from national primary school tests suggests that pupils' achievements on entry do not vary much from year to year, but that the 1999 intake (currently in Year 8) had marginally the highest overall level of attainment. About three-quarters of pupils reach the national yardstick of at least Level 4 in these national tests at the end of primary schooling. The proportion reaching the higher Level 5+ has increased over 1997-2000 from about one sixth to nearly one third of the intake. Another series of tests administered by the school over the last five years tells a similar story.

3. The school has inadequate statistical evidence to judge pupils' rate of progress as they move through the school to the end of Year 9. The evidence available suggests that pupils make satisfactory progress: for example, the proportions of pupils in Year 9 in 1999-2000 who attained Level 5+ or Level 6+ in the national tests were similar to the commensurate levels they had reached three years earlier. Examination of pupils' written work during the inspection confirmed that their overall level of attainment by the end of Year 9 was average and their progress generally sound.

4. In the national tests taken at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2000, pupils' overall standard was average. The proportion of pupils who achieved the two national standards of either Level 5+ or Level 6+ was above average in mathematics, well above average in science, but below average in English. The position was similar in 1999. On the average "points" that pupils scored in 2000, their attainment was below average in English, above average in mathematics and well above average in science. Science has been the strongest of the three subjects in the school (and particularly at the higher levels) since the Year 9 national tests began in 1995. The overall trend of the school's results is broadly in line with the rising national trend.

5. Teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment in these subjects were fairly similar to the test results pupils achieved in mathematics and science. This was also true of English in 1996-1997. In the last three years, however, teachers' assessments of English have often varied widely from the test results awarded to pupils - sometimes much higher and sometimes lower - at least in part as a result of insufficient rigour in internal standardisation procedures.

6. When these 2000 Key Stage 3 results are compared with those in schools which have a similar background (as measured solely by the proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals), pupils in this school performed much better overall than the group average. At both Level 5+ and Level 6+ as well as for average points scored, for example, attainment was average in English, but comparatively very high in mathematics and science. The position was largely similar in 1999.

7. In the five other (non-core) subjects formally assessed at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2000, teachers judged the overall level of attainment of pupils currently in Year 10 as average in design and technology and in modern foreign languages; above average in geography and history; and well above average in information and communication technology (ICT). A noticeable feature has been the strong rise in attainment in both design and technology and in ICT recorded by teachers over the 1998-2000 period. Inspectors concur with

three of these assessments, but judge that attainment in geography and ICT is average overall.

8. In GCSE examinations in 2000, pupils' overall achievement was around the national average - both for pupils' average points scores and for the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A\*-C. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more of these higher (A\*-C) grades over the 1994-2000 period was 38-49 per cent (and in five of the seven years very consistently 43-45 per cent) against a national average of 41-47 per cent. The proportion gaining five or more grades A\*-G was well below average in 2000. This low rating is largely accounted for by pupils' achievements in a substantial non-GCSE, work-experience based course not counting towards the school's GCSE statistics. Over the period 1994-2000 the overall trend in the school's results (as measured by average points scores) was static and below the rising trend nationally: the points score over 1994-1996, for example, was around the national average, but dipped to slightly below average over the following four years.

9. In the three core subjects pupils' achievement in GCSE in 2000 was close to the national average in English and mathematics, but (unusually) slightly below average in science. Over the last four years the results in mathematics have been consistently around the national average, whilst those in English have shown a substantial rise from a low position. Science results are normally slightly above average, but were a little lower in 2000, though still close to average.

10. When pupils' performances in the GCSE subjects they took in 1996-2000 are compared with one another, pupils did significantly better in at least four out of the five of these years in mathematics, physics, and design and technology, but worse in both English language and English literature. In the last three years science usually performed well and geography relatively weakly.

11. The overall quality of GCSE grades obtained in this school in 1999 and 2000 was typical of the pattern nationally, but was a little below average in 1998. The proportion of pupils obtaining the highest A\* grade is usually below average. In 2000, for example, no boy achieved this grade in English literature, double science, biology, graphics or French and only one boy obtained it in chemistry, design and technology (resistant materials), geography or German. Except in 1998, however, boys' overall performance in this school has been slightly higher (much higher in 1996) than the national average for boys in recent years.

12. When the school's average points scores at GCSE are compared with those in schools with a similar "free school meals" background, this school's performance was well above average in both 1999 and 2000 for the proportion of pupils gaining at least five A\*-C grades and for points scores. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A\*-G was above the group average in 1999, but below it in 2000. By the same measure, pupils' overall performance was well above average in both years in mathematics and science. In English it was well above the group average in 2000, but average in 1999.

13. Most pupils make satisfactory progress in their studies as they move through the school from Year 9 to the end of Year 11. Taking into account pupils' achievements in the national tests two years previously, there is statistical evidence that their overall rate of progress slowed a little during Years 10-11; much of this slippage can, however, be convincingly explained away. The evidence of the inspection indicates that the vast majority of pupils make at least satisfactory progress over Years 10-11. Progress is, however, restricted a little (particularly in Key Stage 4) by a combination of three factors - the short teaching week, the short length of many lessons and many teachers' over-reliance on a didactic method of teaching. The school did not quite reach the three main targets it set itself for GCSE in 2000. Those set for 2001 are both realistic and attainable.

14. In the sixth form the overall results at GCE A-level for those pupils entered for two or more subjects were average in 1997 and 1998, well above average in 1999 and close to average in 2000, when assessed by the criterion of total average points gained by each pupil. These ratings are partly explained by the fact that most pupils take general studies at A-level in addition to the normal three other subjects, thereby raising their total scores. In contrast, the pass rates (76-86 per cent compared with the national rates of 86-90 per cent), the quality of grades obtained and average subject scores were a little below average over most of the 1996-2000 period. The pupils who took their A-level examinations in 1999 achieved the school's best results: this cohort was stronger than the one of 2000, achieved average results and gained a much greater proportion of the highest (A or B) grades than other recent year groups.

15. All pupils who took the GCE A-level examination in 2000 passed in English, English Literature, art, German, PE studies and psychology. Only one pupil failed in each of chemistry, physics, geography, music and sports studies. None of the highest (A or B) grades, however, was obtained in chemistry, computing, French, German, music or PE. The pass rate was below 60 per cent in biology, computing and French. Pupils' performances at A-level in 2000 showed at least satisfactory progress in about three-fifths of cases from their earlier achievements at GCSE: over a fifth of pupils made satisfactory progress from their level of attainment two years earlier and nearly two-fifths made good progress. The progress of almost a further two-fifths was, however, unsatisfactory.

16. The level of success in the sixth form in a range of seven General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) courses at Intermediate (five) and Advanced (two) levels in 2000 varied widely. It ranged from all pupils passing at Intermediate level in business education and in health and social care to only one third passing in art and design at the same level. The overall attainment of the relatively small and fluctuating numbers of pupils on the GNVQ programmes is average at Advanced level and a little below average at Intermediate and Foundation levels.

17. In work seen during the inspection pupils' overall standard of attainment was in line with that expected nationally for pupils of similar ages at all stages of the school. Their attainment is, however, above average in science and history at the end of Key Stage 3, in science and in design and technology at the end of Key Stage 4, and in design and technology and in physical education (PE) in the sixth form. Attainment is below average in religious education (RE) at the end of Key Stage 3 because of inadequacies in course content, time allocation and management of the subject. Virtually no RE is taught in Key Stage 4. In all other National Curriculum subjects and key stages (other than those mentioned above) attainment is average. Pupils with special educational needs achieve appropriately and make sound (and often good) progress when taught by staff with a full understanding of their special needs. Their progress is variable within main school departments, but satisfactory overall, although limited flexibility and confidence are sometimes evident in teaching these pupils.

18. In English the overall attainment of pupils is average at the ends of both Year 9 and Year 11 in all the elements of reading, writing and speaking. Their level of attention in listening is, however, above average. The quality and range of discussions vary widely, but are of an average level overall. The strongest element is pupils' familiarity with, and competence in using, specialist literary vocabulary. All aspects of writing are typical of what is found nationally. Reading aloud is only occasionally used as a means of encouraging oral capability and checking on standards.

19. In other subjects across the school and in all year groups (including the sixth form) pupils' standard of reading is also average. Pupils generally have the competence to read for extracting information, although techniques such as skimming texts for key points are rarely formally taught. Researching reference books for relevant information is a feature of some lessons in design and technology, geography, history and music. Pupils' reading aloud is generally satisfactory, although even some sixth-formers stumble over fairly common words.

20. Pupils' standard of writing is broadly average in most subjects, although generally above average in science, music and business education. Work is usually adequately planned, although the use of different techniques to shape writing is less frequent in the school than normal. The drafting of work and the taking of notes for discussion or later extended writing are relatively rare. There is sometimes, as in geography, an overuse of copying notes. Good examples of extended analytical writing occur in a few subjects such as history and music, but are not a strong feature of most subjects. Spelling, punctuation and handwriting are of an average standard overall, but often above average in the minority of cases where individual teachers put a high emphasis on technical accuracy.

21. Most pupils listen well – and usually particularly well in design and technology, for example – although a minority are easily distracted. Many pupils are very confident and ready to offer their opinions in informal settings. Their standard of speaking clearly and articulately in lessons varies very widely. A minority of pupils, including many in the sixth form, have a good command of appropriate vocabulary and express themselves clearly and precisely. A significant minority are voluble, but lack sufficient subtlety of vocabulary

to put their point of view convincingly. The overall standard of speaking is close to average, but could be higher if more importance and time were given in class to rigorous discussion.

22. In mathematics and in numeracy across the curriculum, the overall standard is average. Pupils handle simple numbers with reasonable facility and have, for instance, fair skill in making estimates or approximations. Mental mathematics is not, however, a strength: a significant proportion of pupils do not have a ready, accurate recall of number facts and reach too readily for calculators. Most pupils have sufficient competence in drawing and interpreting graphs.

23. The overall level of attainment in science in Years 7-11 is above average because of thorough teaching. Most pupils enjoy the subject and have fair knowledge of its basics. Top sets are good at assembling and analysing evidence and forming hypotheses. The retention of information or more advanced concepts is often shaky amongst other pupils. The overall standard of ICT is average in specifically taught courses, but a little below average overall across the school. The standard of ICT achieved in design and technology and in music is often good, but is lower than often found in English, mathematics, science, geography, history and RE. The further raising of standards in oracy, literacy, numeracy and ICT capability requires, above all, clear whole-school policies that are systematically and consistently taught, monitored and reviewed.

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

24. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are generally good and often very good. This is particularly noteworthy, given the recent merger of the school's two sites into one and the limited play, social and circulation areas available to pupils. There is, however, a small minority of pupils who sometimes find it difficult to conform to this generally good pattern and high level of discipline by behaving impulsively and inconsiderately both within class and around the school.

25. Pupils come readily to school and show strong interest in the provision made for them, both within and outside lesson times. In class the vast majority of pupils show very positive attitudes to work. They settle quickly to the tasks before them and maintain their interest and motivation throughout. They cooperate well with teachers and work productively in groups. In only a very small number of lessons (around three per cent) are pupils' attitudes less than satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs respond positively to the teaching they receive: in many cases they show better attitudes to learning than those sometimes displayed by their more able peers in mainstream education.

26. Behaviour around the school is generally good. Pupils show a high level of respect for the buildings and other property. There is very little incidence of graffiti. There is, however, a considerable amount of litter around. This problem, allied to the untidy condition of parts of the site, contributes to a poor quality of environment, despite the considerable boost from new accommodation. The provision of many litter bins and regular cleansing by ancillary staff have not solved the problem.

27. There is no evidence of any significant occurrence of bullying or other forms of harassment among pupils. When such incidents occur, staff act swiftly and effectively to deal with the issue. In general, pupils show respect and understanding for the values and achievements of other people.

28. Pupils have a good capacity to assume responsibility and exercise initiative. This is demonstrated in many forms - as, for example, in the work of school librarians and House office holders, in the large number of pupils participating in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, in the sixth form council and in voluntary and charitable work. There were no permanent exclusions in the year preceding the inspection - a considerable achievement for a boys' school of this size. Whilst the number of fixed-term exclusions was high, these were carefully applied within a well-structured and balanced disciplinary system.

29. The attendance of most pupils is good. The school's overall level of attendance is broadly satisfactory, but should be a little higher. In the 1999-2000 academic year pupils' overall attendance was 90.5 per cent - about three percentage points below the recently improved national average (for both boys and girls) of 93.7 per cent. The level of attendance dipped last year, but had been consistently a little above the

national average in the previous three years. The fall in 1999-2000 was largely due to an increase in the rate of authorised absence. The level of attendance is close to what it was at the previous inspection in 1996.

30. The level of authorised absence in 1999-2000 (8.8 per cent) was higher than the national average of 5.9 per cent, but at the same level as in 1995-1996. The amount of absence without good reason (0.7 per cent) in the same year was a little above average and slightly higher than in 1996. Examination of attendance records indicates that the unauthorised absence is largely associated with a small number of pupils who have very low or irregular attendance in Years 10 and 11, despite the efforts of the school's staff to secure an acceptable level of attendance. The main reasons for authorised absence are illness or holidays taken in term-time.

31. The school's prospectus urges parents to regard good attendance and punctuality as very important matters. The school puts a high degree of emphasis on pupils' achievement of regular attendance and punctuality, including an appropriate system of rewards for 100 per cent attendance. The school has a thorough and effective computerised system for recording and analysing pupils' attendance and for pinpointing problems.

32. Pupils' punctuality for school and for lessons is generally good, although lateness on Monday mornings is often higher than on other days. Nearly all pupils are punctual for registration, although a small minority take little notice of the warning hooter. The school has satisfactory systems in place to combat truancy. On occasions the number of cases requiring active follow-up for absence exceeds the capacity of the welfare service to deal with.

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

33. Teaching is good overall and of similar quality throughout the school, including the sixth form. It is satisfactory or better in virtually all lessons - satisfactory in over two-fifths of all lessons and good in a further two-fifths. Additionally, one sixth of the school's teaching is very good. Only five lessons out of the 264 inspected had teaching that was unsatisfactory overall, although a larger proportion of lessons had some unsatisfactory features.

34. The overall quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. In 1996 11 per cent of teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory. This weak element has now been reduced to only a sixth of what it was - a significant improvement. The amount of very good (or outstanding) teaching seen (16 per cent) is a little higher than reported last time. The combined proportion of teaching that is good or very good, however, is a little less than that recorded in 1996. The amount of teaching that is judged "satisfactory" has increased from 29 to 43 per cent.

35. Teachers generally have good knowledge of the subjects they teach. Many are thorough in expounding what they know and communicate their enthusiasm vigorously to pupils. Depth of subject knowledge enables many staff to illustrate topics with a range of appropriate examples and to present a coherent picture of the subject to pupils. Teachers share their expertise willingly. Many give appropriate guidance to pupils on relevant techniques: in art in Year 7, for example, a teacher explained detailed techniques of shading and drew on perspectives from the media, the Renaissance and northern European art. In English, as a result of knowledgeable teaching, pupils in Year 7 thoughtfully identified words that conveyed the mood or atmosphere of such things as silence, moonlight or loneliness.

36. Although the school has no comprehensive policy, across all subjects and years of the curriculum, to guide the teaching of basic skills or to foster language and numeracy coherently, most teachers pay reasonable attention to these aspects. They occasionally help pupils to understand the mechanics of language through appropriate attention to such matters as the structuring of writing, drafting notes, spelling and punctuation. In a few departments such as design and technology, geography and music teachers display key technical words, but the practice is not widespread and those on display are not always referred to. Numeracy is soundly taught in mathematics and French teaching, for instance, sometimes incorporates the language of number manipulation.

37. Lessons are generally satisfactorily planned. Most teachers prepare clear, written guidance for themselves and pupils about the objectives and content of lessons. Fewer, however, convey the purpose of lessons crisply and clearly to pupils on all occasions and give an outline of what is to come. In the best lessons, pupils know very clearly what they have to do. This is because teachers themselves are certain about what information, ideas or skills they want pupils to learn and plan lesson content very thoughtfully and carefully to ensure that this happens. Such teachers are not easily sidetracked from their main purpose.

38. In a science lesson in the sixth form, for example, the teacher's precise planning - and adherence to it in practice - ensured that pupils learned quickly and securely from direct exposition, from work in groups and from a thorough review at the end of 35 minutes. The teacher's careful planning for lower-attaining pupils in a Year 8 music lesson meant that the pace and material were precisely adapted to their needs, with the result that they made good progress. In a significant minority of lessons, however, time was not planned adequately for the end of lessons to review and consolidate the ground that had already been covered. The short length of many lessons, too, limits the scope of such reviews. In these cases neither the teacher nor pupils could be certain of the depth and accuracy of what had been learned.

39. The management of classroom behaviour is a notable strength of the school. With few exceptions, teachers have a firm hold over their classes through a confident classroom presence, prompt rebukes (where necessary), the avoidance of unnecessary confrontation and the appropriate use and sharing of humour. Many teachers have a forceful presence, maintain clear eye contact with pupils, use well-targeted questions, are alert and are usually patient in explanation. In these classes the climate is created for pupils to make good progress in their studies. In only a few cases is learning hindered by pupils' chatter or immature and inconsiderate behaviour.

40. The majority of teachers use a satisfactory range of effective teaching methods. In the best lessons teachers ensure that previous work is speedily revised and the scene set for new work amongst the whole class together. They then frequently open up topics by a suitable variety of methods such as discussion, individual research and work in pairs or group work, followed by a whole-class sharing of ideas. They ensure that lessons are well rounded off by a summary of the main conclusions. In these kinds of lessons class discussion is a vital means of exploring ideas, considering alternative points of view, forming conclusions and deepening understanding.

41. In an English lesson in Year 8, for example, the teacher's quick-fire questions rapidly developed pupils' understanding of a range of poetic structures such as Haiku, limericks and couplets. In a Year 11 science lesson brainstorming elicited clear ideas on radioactivity as part of GCSE revision. In a very stimulating history lesson in Year 9 pupils played roles, very perceptively and enthusiastically in small groups, as Clemenceau, Lloyd George and Woodrow Wilson to solve the problems of post-1918 Europe and then compared their own solutions with the policies of the Great Powers. In an outstanding lesson within the design and technology department pupils in Year 9 were very actively and rapidly involved in planning, weighing and measuring for cookery: a range of tasks, using a variety of teaching methods, was undertaken with great pace, precision, interest and commitment.

42. Many teachers rely a little too heavily, however, on a lecturing mode of imparting information and ideas. They sometimes talk too much, give answers too quickly and do not allow pupils time to think things through or offer their own explanations. In some instances they allow only very brief answers, but then immediately take over and expand upon pupils' replies without expecting, or allowing, pupils to explain their ideas in a fuller way. Such over-reliance on a didactic method of teaching restricts pupils' opportunities to learn how to think for themselves, to cope with new material or to express themselves orally. Techniques such as brainstorming, note-taking and classroom presentations by pupils are infrequently used. There are clear indications that these restrictions impede pupils' progress. The short length of lessons, too, with their frequent changeovers, limits teachers' scope, impedes depth of learning and encourages restrictive short-cuts.

43. Teachers have sound aspirations for their pupils and the majority set high standards. In the best lessons teachers require pupils to give answers at an appropriate length, to think clearly and to explain their reasoning. They encourage pupils to use technical language appropriate to their subjects and value precision and detail. As a result, pupils themselves learn to value high standards, and make good progress in their



studies. In a music lesson in Year 7, for example, the teacher's emphasis on the correct names of instruments and musical personnel significantly extended pupils' knowledge. In a minority of lessons, however, pupils are not required to pay sufficient attention to detail, accuracy or depth of study, with the result that learning lacks intellectual rigour or creative sparkle.

44. Time is normally used well. Teachers generally maintain a good pace in the short, single lessons, but the combination of short lessons, time-consuming changeovers and the shorter than average teaching week nibble away at teaching time and pupils' rate of progress. Resources are generally used well and at times imaginatively - as, for example, in the use of an overhead projector in a Year 8 English lesson to explore the use of poetic structures, language and imagery. Teachers assess pupils' work satisfactorily in most subjects, often giving constructive ideas as to how work can be improved. Homework is generally set appropriately to reinforce or extend what has been learned in school.

45. Teaching is good overall throughout the school. It is very good in design and technology in Years 10-13 and in psychology in the sixth form. It is satisfactory overall in ICT and RE in Years 7-9; in science and history in Years 10-11; in art in the sixth form; and in English, geography and modern foreign languages throughout the school. In all other National Curriculum subjects (as well as business education) and in other key stages, it is good. The teaching of personal and social education (PSE) ranges from good to unsatisfactory, but is satisfactory overall. The teaching of vocational courses is good: teachers are well qualified and the majority have industrial and commercial experience.

46. Pupils with special educational needs (SEN) are taught largely by specialist staff, who also visit many other departments in the main body of the school. The quality of teaching provided by the specialist staff is always sound and often good. They are very experienced, have a wide repertoire of teaching approaches and know the pupils very well. Their level of specialist training does not, however, fully match the increasingly diverse range of special needs that the school is called upon to meet. The coordinator for SEN (SENCO) and head of faculty are influential across the school, but have too little time to act in a consultancy role to teachers in other departments.

47. Nearly all subjects have at least some teaching that is very good. A quarter of all the school's teaching of this quality was in the design and technology department - as well as three-fifths of this department's teaching. At least four-fifths of the teaching in history, music and PE was good (or better). Teachers in this school work hard and successfully to achieve and maintain a high commitment from pupils to hard work and good behaviour.

48. Most pupils make sound progress in their studies both in lessons and over longer periods of time. In two-fifths of classes pupils learn well and make good progress and in a further one ninth very good progress. The quality of learning is satisfactory in about half the lessons and very rarely below a reasonable level. Pupils make a similar rate of progress as they move through the school. Both gifted and talented pupils and those who have special educational needs generally make sound progress.

49. The quality of learning and rate of progress of all pupils are closely linked to the quality of teaching they experience or - in a few cases - predominantly to the effort and attention they give to their studies. Most pupils work hard and with purpose and show interest in their classwork and homework. When pupils are encouraged to be involved actively in what they are doing and have suitable opportunities to discuss what they are taught, they generally make great strides in their work.

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

50. The school provides a curriculum which is, with the exception of RE, well balanced and successfully offers a good range of learning opportunities to meet the needs of all pupils. This has been achieved through thoughtful and measured development and particularly by making full use of consortium arrangements with local schools and colleges and close links with the local community in Years 10-13.

51. In Key Stage 3 (Years 7-9) each subject of the National Curriculum and RE is taught. Pupils study one modern foreign language in Year 7 and two in Years 8 and 9. All pupils study personal, social

and health education (PSHE) throughout these years, including teaching on sex and anti-drugs education. The provision in art, drama and music has improved considerably since the time of the previous inspection and now fully meets national requirements.

52. In Key Stage 4 (Years 10-11) all pupils study the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The option of studying biology, chemistry and physics as separate sciences is taken by 60 pupils who have a particular aptitude for the subject. All pupils also follow courses in PSHE, careers education and PE. The school continues to extend the appropriate range of optional subjects to be offered for GCSE examinations: it has recently successfully added food technology and PE, and has firm plans to introduce performing arts in September 2001.

53. An innovative and very successful vocational programme, which involves college-based study and work experience, is offered to 48 pupils for whom the full range of GCSE subjects is inappropriate. These pupils are sensibly dispensed from the need to study a modern foreign language in Years 10-11. They may also follow a GNVQ course in leisure and tourism. This very effective provision utilises the very good links the school has established with local firms and colleges.

54. The school makes very good provision for both GCE A-level and vocational courses in Years 12-13. In addition to the good range of GCE A-level courses, pupils follow a general studies course that includes a strong element of key skills in Year 12. They also participate in an activities afternoon that includes PE. Vocational courses are provided through the Wallasey Sixth Form Consortium of three schools, ensuring that an extensive range of courses is available at all levels. This provision is very well organised and enables the school to provide a range of subjects that it could not sustain economically on its own.

55. The curriculum meets all statutory requirements except in RE in Years 10-13. There is virtually no teaching of RE in Years 10-11 and an inadequate programme in Years 12-13. The timetabled time for PSHE is uneven across Years 7-9 and restricts the opportunity for teaching a coherent course in sufficient depth. Both of these weaknesses were also reported at the time of the last inspection. Insufficient progress has been made in addressing both of them.

56. All pupils have the opportunity to study the full range of subjects offered. The wide range of both academic and vocational courses available ensures that the school meets the needs of all pupils. With the exception of English and mathematics, which are taught in sets of similar attainment throughout, pupils are taught in mixed-attainment groups in Year 7 and in pairs of attainment sets, based on the House system, in Years 8 and 9. This pattern is maintained as far as possible in Years 10-11. Throughout two groups of lower-attaining pupils are taught separately. These arrangements are generally appropriate and effective, but do not take sufficient account of imbalances in autumn- and summer-born children in the groupings.

57. The school fulfills the requirements of the current national code in its provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN). Both governors and key staff have appropriate responsibilities. The dual appointment of a head of faculty and a separate SEN coordinator reflects both the size of the school's provision and the importance attached to this work by the school. The provision of a large department for Educational Development and Guidance (EDG) within the school for some 30 pupils each year who are assessed as having special educational needs reflects well the school's values, is successful in the education it provides and is widely praised and valued by professionals in contact with the school and by parents.

58. Pupils themselves place high value on the help and support they receive in the department. They view the EDG provision as a secure base from which they can safely develop as young people. The balance between unit-dependence and inclusion in the main school is well handled. This is particularly helped by the "alternative curriculum" provided in Years 10-11.

59. The school has an average number of pupils with special educational needs. The school's curricular provision is generally sound. The school's decision not to circulate all individual education plans (IEPs) in full to all relevant staff leads to some gaps in provision. The introduction of a new national Code

provides a good and necessary opportunity for the school to review the impact and effectiveness of this restriction. The extent to which work for pupils with special educational needs is well matched in subject teaching varies from very good (in GNVQ courses) to unsatisfactory (in ICT), but is sound overall.

60. The school's curricular provision for gifted and talented pupils has been overtaken by the provision now being set up under the *Excellence in Cities* project. The additional provision currently being made by subject areas varies from very good (in design and technology) to poor (in English and geography), but is sound overall. During the inspection specific effective initiatives were observed - an accelerated pace of learning and enrichment in mathematics, the development of specialist ensemble work in music and extracurricular sporting provision in PE.

61. The procedures for curricular planning are generally sound. The recently established links between the senior management team and subject faculties do not, however, yet represent a sound system for monitoring the effectiveness of the curriculum and curricular arrangements across the school, because responsibilities and criteria for success are unclear. The quality of schemes of work varies widely: they are very good in music, good in mathematics, art, design and technology, history and ICT, and satisfactory elsewhere - except in RE where they are unsatisfactory.

62. The school has no written policy for raising standards in literacy as part of the National Literacy Strategy and there is no effective coordination across subjects. An initiative to improve spelling has been instituted, but this has been introduced effectively only in design and technology, modern foreign languages and music. Overall, it has not generally been implemented successfully. An initiative, as part of the National Numeracy Strategy, to raise standards of numeracy is being developed in the mathematics department, but has not been extended to other subjects.

63. The school's total teaching time is 23 hours 35 minutes per week in Years 7-10 and 24 hours 10 minutes in Year 11. These are well below the 25 hours recommended by the Department for Education and Employment for at least Key Stage 4. Those lessons timetabled for 35 minutes (and below 35 minutes in practice) restrict the breadth and depth of what is taught and slow progress in most subjects.

64. A very good range of extracurricular activities enhances the curriculum. Musical activities include a junior choir and a number of bands. Over 100 pupils are involved in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. The Karting Club, where pupils build, maintain and drive their karts under the supervision of staff, is very popular. Out-of-school residential visits include exchange visits to France and Germany. Visits are also made to local theatres, galleries and sites of historic interest.

65. Sports teams take part in an extensive programme of inter-school and inter-house fixtures in a wide range of sports. There are also soccer tours both abroad and in the United Kingdom. Approximately 70 per cent of pupils are involved in competitive sports, including inter-house competitions, 30 per cent of whom participate in inter-school matches. They are supported by a strong and willing commitment from 12 members of the teaching staff. A good programme of study support is provided.

66. The provision for careers education and guidance is good overall. In Years 9-11 there is a well-developed scheme of work that is taught effectively, mainly by a team of specialist teachers. This is supplemented by visits from local employers and careers officers, a bi-annual careers convention and a successful *Challenge of Industry* day in Year 9. In the sixth form there is no timetabled time for careers education, which is arranged on an unsatisfactory, occasional basis. Impartial advice is given by the careers service. It appropriately concentrates on those pupils deemed to be in greatest need and on "drop-in" clinics arranged during lunchtimes. A specialist careers officer for sixth-form pupils also visits the school.

67. All pupils in Year 10 participate for one week in well-coordinated work experience. There is a sound programme of preparation and follow-up work. During the week of their placement pupils complete a diary and are visited by a member of staff. There is a satisfactory careers library. Its location in a classroom used for teaching, away from the main school building, however, makes access difficult.

68. There are good links with the local community. The school's arrangements with the Wallasey Sixth Form Consortium ensure that the good relationships that exist with other local schools and employers are maintained. Representatives of local industries also visit the school as part of the careers programme and the strong links the school has with Aberystwyth University provide support for pupils intending to go to university on leaving school. As stated in the previous report, liaison with local contributory primary schools to ensure the smooth progression of courses between primary and secondary education is weak. Relationships with institutions of initial teacher training, in contrast, are good and the school regularly hosts the training of six student teachers.

69. The school's provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good overall, although provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory. Religious education is not sufficiently covered in the curriculum and, in consequence, issues of faith and belief do not play a significant part in the school. In most assemblies, however, pupils have brief opportunities for prayer and reflection. The school organises religious education days, mainly for pupils in Year 10, in which pupils hear about and discuss issues associated with Amnesty International and Christian Aid. In lessons pupils also learn about Hindu and Buddhist faiths and traditions. The school observes the main religious festivals and organises visiting speakers from time to time - as, for example, a Church of England priest and representatives of the Gideons. Spirituality is not promoted well within subject departments, except in art where there is a marked, creative ethos and good opportunities for pupils for critical reflection. The provision of spiritual education was identified as a weakness in the previous inspection report. Too little has been accomplished since 1996.

70. Pupils' moral education is promoted well. In spite of the school's large size and recent relocation, pupils' standards of orderliness, behaviour and manners are well controlled and carefully monitored by experienced teachers, many of whom have long service in the school. An effective merit system reinforces pupils' attitudes to hard work and good conduct, and there is a system of graduated detentions that is well understood. Pupils are given clear messages about right and wrong conduct in daily lessons, in assemblies and as they move about the school. Supervision at mid-morning breaks and lunchtimes is diligent.

71. Heads of House get to know their pupils well over a long period of time and exercise appropriate disciplinary measures where these are needed. The house system provides good opportunities for pupils to develop a sense of loyalty. A wide range of house activities, including competitions, encourages pupils to exercise responsibility and loyalty and instils a sense of teamwork and fair play. Moral development is well promoted within the curriculum. In art, for example, pupils develop a respect for values; in design and technology they consider the effect of products on the environment; and in history they deal with such topics as fascism, slavery and unfair exploitation.

72. Provision for pupils' social development is good. Pupils experience a wide range of friendships in daily classes through the form, year and house groupings. They benefit from a very good range of extracurricular activities which are especially strong in music and PE. The house system provides good opportunities for pupils to exercise responsibility throughout the age range. Pupils may serve as librarians, become form captains or captains for sporting activities. A prefect system and sixth-form council both offer responsibilities to older pupils and enable them to act as role models. The school promotes an interest in politics by organising mock elections. It is already planning the inclusion of citizenship as a formal curricular topic in anticipation of the national initiative. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme provides challenges and further social experiences for a large number of pupils, especially in Year 9.

73. The school buildings offer pupils very varied facilities for socialisation. Whilst the whole site has poor aesthetic appeal and few good spaces where pupils can relax, the school has organised lunchtimes well to enable pupils to eat and converse in a pleasant atmosphere. Breakfast facilities are already available for pupils in Year 11. The school has plans to extend this provision.

74. In some subjects pupils work well together in planned learning activities. In science, for example, pairs and groups work on experiments and investigations, and in music pupils perform and compose together. In PE pupils benefit from collaborative work in their practice of skills and in competitive games.

75. Pupils' cultural development is soundly promoted. Week-long projects have included poetry and multi-cultural arts, during which professional artists lead workshops and give tuition to pupils. Out of these have developed regular sessions on African drumming that offer high quality musical experiences to pupils. In connection with foreign language learning, pupils visit France and Germany, where they also learn about contrasting ways of life. The provision of facilities, especially accommodation in both art and music, has improved since the last inspection. In art critical studies, visits to museums and galleries and a creative ethos contribute greatly to pupils' cultural education. In music pupils study a very wide range of styles, both from European and World music sources. In design and technology pupils study modern trends in design and meet representatives from commercial producers. In science pupils study different diets from around the world. Pupils have limited opportunities, however, for face-to-face encounters with groups such as artists, entertainers, religious leaders from ethnic minority groups or entrepreneurs.

76. The school provides an unusually wide range of formats for regular assemblies for its pupils. Pupils sometimes congregate, for instance, in house or year groups. In spite of this provision, the school falls short of meeting the legal requirement to provide a daily act of worship for all pupils. Such gatherings do not always incorporate collective worship and tutorial time very rarely includes such provision.

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

77. The school provides a high level of care for pupils. This is rooted in the dedication of the staff, both teaching and non-teaching, and in a House system that offers pupils many opportunities for personal development and a strong sense of security in their time in school.

78. The school's detailed provision for the care of pupils is good overall. Form teachers and other House staff are seen by pupils as a ready source of help and support, whenever they encounter any difficulties. The school nurse provides valuable medical support, plays an important role in health education and is available to offer guidance and counselling to pupils who require this. There are other professionals who support teachers in this work: these include visiting youth workers, counsellors and three personal mentors, recently appointed under the *Excellence in Cities* programme. Arrangements for child protection are good and well known to staff. On the other hand, some aspects of welfare provision are not satisfactory. Some toilets are poorly maintained and lack soap and drying facilities. There are few social areas where pupils can assemble in comfortable surroundings, particularly in poor weather.

79. The school achieves its good standards of behaviour through a clear and well-supported system of rewards and sanctions. It has a sound anti-bullying policy. Guidance for pupils about subject and study options after the end of Years 9 and 11 is effective. Considerable effort is put into the monitoring of pupils' academic progress and sound progress has been made since the last inspection, particularly in Years 10-11. The present system does not, however, provide a sufficiently coherent and standardised picture across the school, particularly in Years 7-9, with the result that teaching staff cannot review, communicate and guide pupils' progress with sufficient accuracy. The school's procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are generally good.

80. The quality of provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE) varies from good to unsatisfactory, but is satisfactory overall. The programmes of work are soundly constructed and form a broad and relevant curriculum. The timetabled allocations for this work, however, vary widely across different year groups and the allocation of staff to the programme in Years 7-9 lacks consistency. The programme is taught by a small specialist team in Key Stage 4. The quality of the teaching of the course is not monitored effectively: it varies from good to unsatisfactory, but is broadly satisfactory overall. The programmes of work provided for pupils with statements of special educational need generally match the recommendations made in those statements.

81. The school has a satisfactory assessment policy that gives suitable guidance on the procedures for the assessment, recording and reporting of pupils' work. Within most subject departments the quality of the day-to-day assessment of individual pupils' work is at least satisfactory. In science, design and technology, ICT and music assessment is good, but it is unsatisfactory in geography and PE, because it

does not relate directly to learning targets. Assessment is also unsatisfactory in RE, because it is not done regularly.

82. Overall, subject departments use a common grading system for assessment, but do not have a sufficiently reliable method to ensure that grades given in different subjects are of equal worth. In those subjects that require assessment against national criteria, the day-to-day evaluations of pupils' work relate to those levels satisfactorily. In Years 10-11 and in the sixth form, assessments relate closely to the requirements of external examinations and, as a consequence, give satisfactory indications of the progress of pupils and suitable guidance on targets for improvement.

83. Procedures for assessing, recording and monitoring pupils' attainment and progress across the school are satisfactory in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. In Years 7-9 procedures are unsatisfactory, because the school does not have a sufficiently detailed and consistent system to enable it to measure accurately both individual pupils' progress and overall school performance throughout this key stage. Insufficient analysis of data to monitor performance in this key stage and beyond was also identified as a weakness in the previous inspection.

84. Interim and annual reports to parents give both grades achieved and written statements about pupils' attainments, effort and progress. There are, however, inconsistencies in the way that subject departments present grades, percentages and position in the year group. This is potentially confusing to parents and pupils. Written comments about pupils' attainment and progress vary widely across subjects in their precision. Overall, they lack detail and do not show clearly enough what pupils have actually achieved nor do they indicate to all parents what their children need to do in order to improve. This was a weakness noted in the previous inspection.

85. Pupils' Records of Achievement to mark the end of compulsory education are of sound quality overall: in some cases these are excellently produced, but a minority are insufficiently personalised. These documents generally represent a clear, cumulative picture of pupils' broad achievement and final levels of attainment, together with a collection of certificates received for success in a wide range of school activities. Assessment provision and practice, including annual and other reviews, are sound for those pupils identified as having a degree of special educational need.

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

86. The school continues to maintain the good links with parents that were reported in the last inspection. Parents and the community hold the school in high regard and this is evidenced by the over-application by parents for the number of places available for admission to the school.

87. Parents are generally very pleased with the progress of their children, the quality of teaching, the standards that the school promotes and its openness and approachability. In addition, a particular strength of the school is its links and involvement with parents of children with special educational needs. In contrast, information about pupils' progress, homework levels and the closeness of links with parents were regarded as insufficient on the pre-inspection parental questionnaire by a minority of parents. The links that the department for pupils with special educational needs has with parents, external agencies and other schools are very good and the school's provision has a high reputation locally.

88. Parents indicate that they find the staff very approachable and helpful. The recently introduced Pupil Planner has facilitated a more regular dialogue between teachers and parents, encouraging parents to contribute more to pupils' learning and day-to-day progress. At the beginning of the academic year the school consolidated its accommodation on one site: this was well planned and implemented, owing partly to the importance that the school places on the induction of Year 7 pupils. This induction programme is well organised and further improvements are already planned, now that the school is on one site.

89. The school's prospectus is concise, but adequate. The GCSE options booklet and sixth form brochure are comprehensive and informative. The information pack distributed to all Year 6 parents at feeder schools and the registration pack given to parents prior to pupils' entry provide a good range of information

that clearly identifies the aims and activities of the school. The registration pack also includes the home-school agreement which parents are asked to sign during the New Parents' Evening.

90. In contrast, the information given for Year 7 about the curriculum is limited. It is not further extended for parents in written form during their children's time in Key Stage 3 until towards the end of Year 9. A calendar of school events is issued to pupils and parents: it identifies such important events as the dates of terms, examinations, parents' evenings and planned dates for reports, and is welcomed by parents.

91. Formal reports to parents are written to a common format, but exhibit inconsistencies of grading and often do not give sufficient detail about pupils' attainment and progress. Parents' consultation evenings are well attended. At these the Parents Association helps with refreshments and, together with parent governors, notes any comments or observations from parents. The Parents Association meets regularly, has a positive input from the school and raises funds that are well used by the school.

92. Information about the activities and achievements of the school and associated matters is communicated to parents through the termly newsletter. Parents are contacted regularly by letter on such specific matters as school outings and holiday activities. A useful survey is currently being conducted about the availability of computers at home and for parental permission for pupils to use the Internet at school.

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

93. The school has a clear and well-formulated set of aims and values to guide its work. These aspire to provide high educational opportunities for all, within an ethos of care, commitment and challenge. These values are vigorously promoted by the school's leadership and are a positive and effective influence across the life of the school.

94. The school's management has successfully guided the school through many recent significant changes, both in its physical accommodation and its curriculum. The integration of two sets of buildings and mini-schools onto one site has been achieved with a minimum of disruption to the school's development. The school is well on the road to building a community that has a strong and unified identity, able to respond positively to the future, including the demands of new patterns of technology and employment.

95. The headteacher has made a very significant impact on all these developments at the school. He has a clear and relevant vision, is decisive when immediate action is called for, but reflects with care and thoughtfulness about longer-term goals. He gives a strong sense of direction and cohesion to the school. He is highly visible and accessible to pupils, parents, staff and governors. All these partners value highly the central contribution he makes to the life and direction of the school.

96. The recently enlarged senior management group is very experienced and functions soundly as a team, though with variation in performance. It liaises closely with the Heads of Faculty group in planning the overall progress of the school. Its strength is the collegiality with which it works, so that all members can contribute to the responsibilities and forward-planning of others. Its weakness is that boundaries of responsibility and accountability may blur, with the result that, for example, a shared approach to establishing reliable indicators of pupils' progress and whole-school performance or of ensuring that RE is adequately taught in Years 10-11 becomes blurred. These issues, together with the emergence of new challenges such as the *Excellence in Cities* programme and the Performance Management of teachers, require the present functions and accountabilities of this senior group to be clarified and tightened. The effectiveness of senior management, subject and pastoral team leaders ranges from very good to unsatisfactory, but is good overall.

97. The governing body is a generally effective group that manages its work in a businesslike way. It gives strong support and commitment to the school and its staff. It is forming a strategic view of the school's future and beginning to monitor carefully the school's effectiveness. It does not, however, have a clear set of principles or means to judge such central aspects as the school's overall performance or pupils' academic progress.

98. A small amount of direct monitoring and evaluation of teaching takes place, but this does not constitute an effective, school-wide system nor a clear focus on pupils' attainment and progress. The school's Performance Management policy, recently adopted by the governors and about to be implemented, is intended to support the necessary systematic monitoring of teaching and learning across the school.

99. The school's planning for future development has improved significantly since the last inspection. Although some aspects lack detailed costings, the plan is well framed and clearly expressed. It appropriately focuses on a suitably small number of key priorities that are reflected in the plans of each subject area. It involves a regular cycle of consultation and review among staff and governors.

100. The school's educational priorities are well supported through sound financial management and planning. The governing body is well informed about the school's patterns of spending and monitors expenditure carefully, although it does not often take the initiative on financial issues. The school appropriately carries forward a small surplus to allow for contingencies. As at the time of the last inspection, there is very effective and efficient financial control and administration by the headteacher and bursar. The last external financial audit raised a number of minor accounting and recording issues. These have been dealt with satisfactorily.

101. Spending by heads of departments is carefully monitored. The school has made appropriate use of funds for staff training and of other specific grants and funds. It makes satisfactory use of such new technologies as e-mail and the Internet and uses electronic monitoring to record pupils' attendance. The school takes best value into account when purchasing services: the issue of the best provider for school meals, for example, was discussed at length by the governors, as was the decision on whether to buy or lease new ICT equipment. The proportion of the school's income spent on the sixth form is a little higher than the income the sixth form generates. The school's income for each sixth-form pupil is, unusually, no higher than that for pupils in Year 11 and is below the national average income for sixth formers.

102. The proportion of the school's budget spent on teaching staff is broadly average. The provision of teaching staff is generally good. Almost all lessons in the school are taught by specialists. As at the time of the last inspection, however, a large proportion of RE lessons are taught by non-specialists and this has a detrimental impact on the quality of teaching and learning in the subject. There are sufficient experienced and competent teachers for pupils with special educational needs, but they do not have formal qualifications in the teaching of special needs. Technical support is sufficient. The number of hours worked by the very efficient administrative staff is below the average for a school of this size. The ratio of pupils to teachers is a little above average. The pattern of the present timetable has inefficiencies: close to an hour each week is taken up by the more frequent changeovers of lessons in this school than normal. The total planned teaching time of around 24 hours per week for most pupils, and under 24 hours for many, is also below that recommended nationally.

103. There is an effective programme of induction to the work of the school for teachers new to teaching. The system of induction for other teachers new to the school is broadly satisfactory, but less effective than that for newly qualified teachers. Opportunities for the professional development of staff are used appropriately. The good overall standard of teaching and learning in the school indicates that the school is capable of being an effective provider of initial teacher training.

104. The school has undergone a major building programme since the last inspection. This has resulted in considerable improvement in the amount and quality of accommodation for science, music, PE and the sixth form, all of which were identified at the last inspection as having poor accommodation. There is, however, still some unsatisfactory accommodation in geography, history, modern foreign languages, RE, business education and for pupils with special educational needs, because the fabric of the buildings is of very poor quality and badly maintained. Despite the best efforts of many teachers to improve the interior of these areas, many parts remain drab and unattractive.

105. There are insufficient sports facilities for a school of this size. The old sports hall is dirty and the walls are in poor condition. At the time of the inspection both soccer pitches were under several centimetres of water due to poor drainage. The library is an attractive room, but is too small for a school



of this size and type. It is, however, larger than at the time of the last inspection. A further building programme, due to begin within the next few months, promises to improve some, but not all, of the poor teaching accommodation and will result in a much larger library. The home-base unit for pupils with special educational needs is of old and shabby construction, but has been made warm and welcoming inside. There is access to the main school buildings for people with physical disabilities, but not to the older separate classroom blocks. The school has toilet provision for disabled people.

106. The spending on learning resources is a little below the national average, but is planned to rise in the current financial year to above average. The provision of resources is good overall. There is, however, a shortage of textbooks for pupils in geography, history and RE. There is insufficient audio-visual equipment in English, design and technology and in geography. The provision of resources for pupils with special educational needs is adequate. The centrally provided ICT facilities are good. The provision of ICT in separate subject departments is now generally satisfactory, but is unsatisfactory in history and in RE, where there is no hardware; in science, where there is insufficient hardware; and in business education, where ICT equipment is not fully networked. The level of resources, including books and ICT, for pupils with special educational needs is adequate, but needs updating.

107. The library provision is not good enough for pupils, especially those in the sixth form, to work independently. Although the quality of books has improved since the last inspection, the stock of books is too small - the result of the small size of the room and the appropriate removal of many out-of-date books. There is no access to the Internet in the library. In addition to the stock of books, three quality newspapers, a satisfactory range of periodicals and a good range of CD-ROMs are available in the library.

108. Overall, taking into account the good quality and range of education provided for pupils, the good overall quality of teaching and the satisfactory progress that pupils make as they move through Years 7-11, set against the below-average amount of money the school receives for its work, the school gives good value for money.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

109. To improve and build upon the good quality of education that pupils already receive, the governors and senior management of the school should:

### (a) improve still further pupils' attainment and rate of progress by

- regularly monitoring and evaluating the quality of teaching to precise criteria that focus on what pupils learn and achieve (## 61 80 98 124 208 220 245);
- removing the few weaknesses in teaching identified in the main body of the report – but especially reducing, in a significant minority of lessons, the amount of time that teachers over-lecture to pupils and, correspondingly, increasing the opportunities for pupils to participate actively in lessons in such activities as research, discussion and reflection (## 13 36 37-39 42-43 145 161 204 242 263 275);
- producing and implementing effectively a policy for the teaching of all aspects of oracy, literacy and numeracy across all subjects and year-groups (## 23 36 62 119 127 150 193);
- raising further pupils' overall attainment and progress in English and geography (## 4-7 9-10 and in the subject sections);
- measuring accurately both pupils' rate of progress and the school's overall performance across Years 7-9 by collating, to a uniform criterion across all subjects, information about pupils' attainments in school in these years and then using it consistently to monitor and guide pupils' work (## 3 7 79 81-84 96 124);
- increasing the amount of teaching time each week to at least the minimum amount of 25 hours recommended by the Department for Education and Employment (## 13 44 63 102); and
- increasing the length of 35-minute lessons to secure greater depth and breadth in both what pupils learn and how they learn (## 13 38 44 63 189 194 265 275).

### (b) ensure that statutory requirements are met by

- teaching religious education (RE) in Years 10-11 (where there is virtually none that meets the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus) and providing an adequate programme of RE in the sixth form. This serious deficiency was also identified in the 1996 inspection and has not been acted upon adequately (## 55 96 270 272 277-278);
- providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils (# 76); and
- thereby improving the school's unsatisfactory provision for pupils' spiritual development (a weakness also identified in 1996) (# 69).

In addition to the key issues above, other less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the school's future plan of action. These are indicated in paragraphs 29 32 46 56 66 68 75 78 90-91 102-106 and in subject sections.

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	264
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	102

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1	15	39	43	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	1257	221
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	307	29

#### Special educational needs

	Y7-Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	54	4
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	251	10

#### English as an additional language

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

#### Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	22
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	15

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.8
National comparative data	5.9

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.7
National comparative data	0.4

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence during the 1999-2000 academic 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	242	0	242

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	128	175	173
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	128	175	173
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	53 (63)	72 (68)	71 (72)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	15 (23)	46 (44)	47 (44)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	177	176	171
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	177	176	171
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	73 (71)	73 (69)	71 (74)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	24 (31)	45 (40)	45 (45)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

Percentages in brackets refer to 1999.

### 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	212	0	212

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	96	180	198
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	96	180	198
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	45 (43)	85 (90)	93 (94)
	National	47 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

Percentages in brackets refer to 1999.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	35.9 (36.4)
	National	38.4 (38.0)

Figures in brackets refer to 1999.

### 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	53	5	58

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	16.8	11.3	16.5 (19.4)	2.0	2.5	2.3 (0.1)
National	17.7	18.6	18.2 (17.9)	2.6	2.9	2.7 (2.8)

Figures in brackets refer to 1999.

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	Advanced - 7 Intermed. - 21
	National – Intermed. Level	73%

### ***Ethnic background of pupils***

	<b>No of pupils</b>
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	4
Black – other	1
Indian	1
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	5
Chinese	10
White	1453
Any other minority ethnic group	3

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

	<b>Fixed period</b>	<b>Permanent</b>
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	3	0
Chinese	0	0
White	165	0
Other minority ethnic groups	1	0

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

### ***Teachers and classes***

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y7–Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	85.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.3

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

#### **Education support staff: Y7–Y13**

Total number of education support staff	13
Total aggregate hours worked per week	328

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7–Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.1
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7–Y11**

Key Stage 3	25.1
Key Stage 4	21.7

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	1999-2000
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	<b>£</b>
Total income	3,266,004
Total expenditure	3,277,175
Expenditure per pupil	2,323
Balance brought forward from previous year	134,019
Balance carried forward to next year	122,848

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1478
Number of questionnaires returned	489

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	35	51	10	3	1
My child is making good progress in school.	42	54	2	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	32	51	9	1	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	11	72	12	3	2
The teaching is good.	34	58	1	1	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	23	51	15	4	7
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	58	39	1	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	61	37	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	27	47	15	1	10
The school is well led and managed.	61	36	1	1	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	44	52	2	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	36	46	10	2	6

### Other issues raised by parents

There were additional comments from parents on 50 of the 489 questionnaires returned.

Amongst the many positive points mentioned were:

- the school's high academic standards and the good progress that pupils make;
- the approachability, care, team-working and dedication of the school's staff; and
- the school's success in treating pupils as individuals and preparing them well for the future.

Amongst the very few concerns expressed in questionnaires were:

- the lack of sufficient information about what is taught and how well pupils are getting on.

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

### **ENGLISH**

110. On entry to the school in Year 7 pupils' overall standard of attainment was close to the national average over the 1997-2000 period; results are not available in the school for 1995-1996. Results of the national tests in English at the end of Year 9 over the 1995-1999 period have shown variability, but have been average overall. They were, however, below the national average in 2000. Pupils' overall level of attainment in the 2000 national tests was in line with that achieved in schools of a similar character (as measured by the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals), but was lower than the same pupils achieved in their mathematics and science tests.

111. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' overall standard in all aspects of language work is average. Most pupils read aloud with reasonable fluency and expression. They have an average understanding of literary techniques. Pupils in Year 7, for example, showed reasonable insight in identifying words that contributed to the creation of the mood and atmosphere in Walter de la Mare's poem, *The Listeners*. When developing their understanding of Haiku poetry, Year 8 pupils deepened their understanding of the significance of such imagery as "dancing flames of gold". In a Year 9 class pupils explored the ways in which facial expression and intonation influenced the making of insults such as "Tallowface" and "Dishcloth" as an introduction to Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In a lower set pupils planned a discussion on the merits of wearing school uniform and checked carefully on the meaning of such words as "survey" and "questionnaire".

112. Pupils listen attentively. They select textual evidence satisfactorily to support their ideas and identify such elements of language use as phrase, adjective and adverb. When writing about the effectiveness of poetry, for instance, pupils use appropriate terminology such as "style", "rhythm" and "theme". They write in different genres and for different audiences satisfactorily. Some pupils demonstrate a sound knowledge of grammar and spelling, but the handwriting and spelling of a significant minority of pupils are weak.

113. Pupils make satisfactory progress in their learning in Years 7-9. Class discussion is used to help pupils to reflect on what they read and to learn increasingly how writers create their desired effects through their choice of language. As they move through Key Stage 3, most pupils improve satisfactorily the planning and organisation of their writing and make good use of textual references to support their ideas.

114. Results in GCSE, in both English Language and English Literature, have risen significantly over the 1998-2000 period from a low position. In 2000 the proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the A\*-C range in English Language was close to the national average. Over the last four years, however, pupils have tended to perform worse in GCSE in both English Language and English Literature than they have in most of their other subjects. Their overall level of attainment in 2000 was, as at the end of Year 9, in line with the average for similar schools, but lower than the results pupils achieved in mathematics and science.

115. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' overall level of attainment is broadly average. In Years 10 and 11 pupils use textual references satisfactorily to inform their understanding of literature. Most pupils discuss their reading thoughtfully and write clearly and effectively on a range of literary texts that includes *A Red, Red Rose* and *Whose Life is it Anyway?* as well as responding to media material. When discussing the opening of Conan Doyle's *The Adventure of the Speckled Band*, for instance, pupils considered carefully the sense of anticipation. The extended writing of most pupils is of a satisfactory standard. Higher-attaining pupils write with a suitable degree of maturity and style.

116. In Key Stage 4 pupils effectively use a fair range of reading strategies to respond to literary texts and to enable them to make inferences and deductions from what they read. Their knowledge and understanding of literature are sound overall. Many pupils read for pleasure. High attainers generally



write well-organised and coherent essays in their exploration of texts and make sound progress in literary criticism. The written work of most pupils has reasonable fluency and technical accuracy, although a significant minority of pupils do not have effective spelling techniques or sufficiently legible and tidy handwriting.

117. Most pupils make sound progress in their work in Years 10-11. More able pupils produce increasingly insightful and mature writing. The vast majority of pupils make at least fair progress in the quality of their writing and in the confidence and coherence with which they express their ideas. Most reflect thoughtfully upon what they have read and express their views cogently in discussion. Pupils with special educational needs and those who are talented make satisfactory progress throughout the school.

118. The overall standard of sixth-form work meets course requirements. From 1998 to 2000 the percentage of pupils gaining the highest A or B grades in GCE A-level has varied considerably. In 2000 just over half the pupils entered for the examination on two syllabuses gained a grade in the A-C range. Most pupils made good progress from the standard they had reached two years earlier in GCSE. Sixth formers have a good knowledge and appreciation of literary texts. They make solid progress and display a good command of literary criticism in both their oral and written work. Year 12 pupils, for example, in studying the poems of Wilfred Owen, considered perceptively how the poet used the subtleties of language to convey attitudes, ideas and values. A Year 13 class used textual evidence persuasively to discuss why the ending of Ibsen's *Ghosts* has often been regarded as ambiguous.

119. Teaching is satisfactory overall in Years 7-11. Two lessons observed in Key Stage 3 were very well taught. Although there are weaknesses in teaching, no unsatisfactory lessons were observed during the inspection. Teachers in the department have a good level of subject knowledge. They generally have reasonable expectations of pupils. Most lessons are planned to include clear learning objectives. In Key Stage 3, however, insufficient attention is given overall to the consistent development of the key skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. This weakness is partly responsible for pupils' lower overall standard of attainment in English, when compared with mathematics and science.

120. The English staff are enthusiastic and concerned to ensure that pupils are successful in their studies. Whilst pupils do take part in oral question and answer sessions and discussions, teachers generally use only a limited range of ways to develop oral work. Written work is regularly marked and most pupils receive constructive feedback to indicate ways in which their work may be improved. Homework is set regularly and is used appropriately either to consolidate or to extend classwork.

121. Teaching in the sixth form is sound. Teachers' depth of knowledge of literature, together with their enthusiasm for the subject, foster a high level of commitment from pupils. Lessons are carefully planned and pupils are carefully guided in their literary enquiries. A notable feature of teaching at this level is the extent to which teachers and pupils work closely together in sharing insights into texts.

122. Pupils' attitudes are generally good. Most pupils enjoy the subject and respond positively to one another. They usually concentrate well in lessons and, when given the opportunity, work constructively together in group work. Behaviour in lessons is good.

123. The study of literature makes a very strong contribution to pupils' moral and social development. Pupils consider thoughtfully, for example, the characters in Ibsen's *Ghosts*, discuss the role of the witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, and the kind of care and attention that would be required to support Ken Harrison in Brian Clarke's play, *Whose Life is it Anyway?* The department organises a range of extracurricular activities that include theatre visits, theatre groups in school, a poetry week, poetry workshops and an arts day.

124. The department is soundly led on most aspects. It does not, however, have effective procedures in place to track pupils' progress across each key stage, partly because it does not have a good knowledge of pupils' strengths and weaknesses on entry to the school. The department's documentation is good: it includes detailed schemes of work, including one for drama. The department does not have a systematic programme of monitoring classroom teaching and learning.

125. Planning for the future is good, although the impact of the National Literacy Strategy on the Year 7 curriculum has not been fully taken into account or put into practice. The department marks pupils' work regularly and reviews samples of their work. An improved standardisation of marking across Years 7-9 is, however, required to provide a secure means of reviewing pupils' attainment and progress. There was limited use of ICT during the inspection. Departmental accommodation and resources are sufficient, apart from an insufficiency of audio-visual equipment. Staff have gone to great lengths to ensure that pupils' work is attractively displayed.

126. Drama has been introduced into the curriculum over the last three years across Key Stage 3. The level of attainment is broadly average overall. Pupils enjoy the subject, generally work with enthusiasm and usually behave well. The quality of teaching ranges from very good to satisfactory and is sound overall. Most pupils make satisfactory progress in their studies. In a lesson seen in Year 9, however, pupils made rapid progress on the theme of insults, because the teacher guided their approach very carefully, helping them to observe and review performances perceptively and sensitively.

127. In other subjects across the school overall standards of reading, writing, speaking and listening are broadly average. Literacy teaching is not, however, systematically planned with the help of a cross-curricular policy. Reading is of average standard overall; pupils generally read aloud with appropriate accuracy and expression in English, history and music. Written work is well presented in science, design and technology and in music, although accuracy in spelling and punctuation is a relative weakness in many subjects. Lists of key words are displayed in some subject areas (such as PE) to support accurate spelling. Suitable "writing frames" to help pupils structure and organise their writing are insufficiently used in most subjects.

## **MATHEMATICS**

128. The proportion of pupils who achieved either the basic standard or higher levels expected of 14 year olds in the 2000 national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 was above average. Based upon the average points scored by all pupils, the school's results were above the average for all schools and were very high when compared with those of schools in similar social circumstances. The results have improved from below average in 1997 to above average in 1999.

129. The proportion of pupils who achieved grades A\*-C in the GCSE examination in 2000 was close to the national average. A larger than average proportion of pupils achieved the highest (A\* or A) grades and around two-fifths achieved grades A\*-B, compared with a national average of a quarter. The results have improved steadily over recent years, in line with the national trend, except for a dip in 1998. Pupils perform better in mathematics than in many of their other subjects.

130. Examination results at GCE A-level in recent years were good up to 1999 (except in 1997): about half of the candidates achieved the highest A or B grades, compared with a national average of about one quarter. In 2000, however, because the group as a whole was not as mathematically talented as in previous years - and (unusually) there were no candidates taking further mathematics - the pass rate was lower than usual and few candidates achieved the highest grades. Consequently, the average points score dropped to well below average, in contrast to the steady rise in previous years to a 1999 score that was well above average.

131. By the end of Key Stage 3, the standard of work of an average proportion of pupils is at least at the level expected of 14 year olds. Pupils in the top sets make good progress and attain high standards in, for example, algebra, geometry, trigonometry and statistics. They apply their knowledge competently to solve more complex problems - for instance, generalising about the patterns and relationships they find in extended investigations of sequences of numbers, including those where the relationship is a quadratic function. Gifted and talented pupils make fast progress through the scheme of work and are occasionally provided with extra, more challenging mathematical problems. Those with special educational needs respond positively to the sound teaching they receive and make satisfactory progress: they enjoyed, for example, their success in finding the perimeters of a number of shapes of increasing complexity, deducing missing lengths from the geometry of the shapes.

132. Many pupils in Year 9 work at a steady pace in lessons and, with help, make satisfactory progress. The achievement of too many pupils, however, is limited by poor recall of previously learned skills and techniques and by insufficient understanding of earlier work. For example, during a lively lesson, conducted at a good pace, a set of average-attaining pupils developed a feeling for the magnitude of numbers by expressing their answers to calculations in standard form, using calculators. About half of the class worked quickly, accurately and successfully. The remainder, however, became confused and disheartened, because they forgot the order in which to press buttons on their calculators to achieve the correct results.

133. The attainment of pupils on arrival at the school in Year 7 is average overall. During their first year in the school they make sound progress. A good emphasis is placed upon numeracy: pupils' confidence in their ready recall of basic number facts and methods of mental calculation is improving. For example, each pupil in an upper set answered a quick-fire mental arithmetic question as he entered the classroom. To consolidate the work of the previous lesson, they were then required to complete quickly ten calculations of the difference between pairs of readings on a thermometer, involving temperatures above and below zero. During the remainder of the lesson, through very good management and challenging questions by their teacher, pupils formed themselves into a number line and quickly learned how to add directed numbers in two ways.

134. Standards are raised further in Years 7 and 8 by the school's recent involvement in the *Thinking Maths* project: this has helped to develop pupils' understanding of mathematics by structuring their learning. For example, two classes of pupils in Year 7 used movement around the map of an area to develop their understanding of vectors, cartesian and polar coordinates, and of appropriate notations to describe these ideas. They participated well in the practical activities and described their movements on the map, using unambiguous notations. In Year 8 pupils generally make steady, systematic progress in acquiring a suitable range of skills and techniques and in increasing their confidence in handling numbers.

135. Nevertheless, the achievement of a significant proportion of pupils is below what it should be. Their lack of retention of earlier work often impedes their progress. For instance, a set of low-attaining pupils consolidated well their understanding of the relative size of whole numbers and of elementary probability by a well-managed practical activity that required them to place numbers, randomly generated by the teacher, in order. When the numbers generated were decimals, however, many pupils in the class became confused and were unable to complete the activity successfully.

136. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' attainment is average overall. Higher-attaining pupils achieve standards above those normally expected of 16 year olds. They gain a good working knowledge of arithmetic, algebra, geometry, trigonometry and data-handling and use their skills to solve problems successfully. The gifted and talented show flair in completing extended investigations of mathematical situations; their depth of study of such skills as sketching graphs of mathematical functions is extended beyond that normally required for GCSE. This provides a good foundation for their later studies at GCE A-level.

137. The large majority of pupils are entered for the intermediate tier of GCSE mathematics and a higher than average proportion of them achieve grade B. Such pupils gain a sound understanding of, for instance, laws of indices and use these well to express numbers in standard form. They manipulate competently, to an appropriate standard, algebraic expressions and solve the required equations. Nevertheless a significant proportion of pupils could achieve higher standards. Such pupils learn many basic skills and techniques, but lack confidence in applying them in unfamiliar situations. They have little sense of urgency or determination to make better progress and gain a firm understanding of the subject. In consequence, their attainment in GCSE examinations is below what it could be. This, in part, is due to too much teaching that helps them to learn basic skills and techniques, but fails to develop their independence and mathematical thinking sufficiently. Low-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in a limited range of topics and generally achieve an average level of competence in numeracy.

138. Progress in Year 10 is satisfactory overall. Pupils in the top set make very good progress in, for instance, understanding some of the basic properties of angles subtended at the centre and the

circumference of a circle by arc. By skilful teaching they discovered the results, using accurate drawing and measurement, before going on to prove these results by mathematical argument. Pupils in the middle sets generally make steady progress and acquire a sound knowledge of basic skills in the subject. In response to very good teaching, some pupils make good progress. For example, one such set of pupils gained a thorough understanding of “average” by a well-managed discussion, conducted at a brisk pace, of mean, median and mode of sets of raw data. Low-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make sound progress overall in a broad range of the subject.

139. As a result of the new arrangements for AS-level and A-level courses in the sixth form, relatively large numbers of pupils take courses to at least AS-level in pure mathematics and applied mathematics or statistics. Their progress is sound. The good, systematic teaching ensures that they gain a firm understanding of, for instance, the forces that maintain an object in a state of equilibrium under various conditions. Similarly, in pure mathematics, they use integral calculations well to find, for example, areas enclosed by intersecting lines and curves. A few also take further mathematics and demonstrate a good but hesitant understanding of, for example, the advanced techniques for sketching curves of a variety of functions.

140. Pupils’ response to the teaching they receive is good overall and occasionally very good. Their attitudes are generally positive and cooperative. Most pupils work hard at the tasks set. Many have pride in their work and present it neatly and logically, using mathematical symbols and terminology correctly. The presentation of written work of too large a minority, however, lacks sufficient care: many answers are sequences of unexplained calculations, lacking any mathematical precision, and fail to convey pupils’ understanding, especially when the final answer is wrong. Equally, a large proportion of pupils lack the confidence to explain their contributions to discussion in correct terminology. In part, this is due to a lack of opportunity to do so.

141. Pupils’ response to appropriate, well-planned work that is taught enthusiastically is good. For example, a set of average-attaining pupils in Year 9 retained their interest throughout a double period, in response to very good teaching. The well-planned sequence of activities consolidated their confidence in handling numbers during a brisk introductory warm-up. They went on to learn how to calculate percentage increase and decrease by thorough discussion of examples in everyday contexts and proceeded to successfully complete an exercise of similar problems.

142. Behaviour in lessons is usually good. Pupils generally show respect for teachers and respond positively to admonition. A minority of pupils, however, readily become disruptive or uncooperative, especially when the work is too difficult for them or is too repetitive and uninteresting, or when they think they can escape the vigilance of the teacher. Most pupils form constructive relationships with their peers and teachers, and enjoy sharing humour. They frequently help one another to clarify misunderstandings.

143. Teaching is good overall. Nearly half of it is satisfactory and about a quarter of it is very good. Teaching in the sixth form is thorough and systematic. The proportion of good teaching reported in the previous inspection has been sustained and the weaknesses in solving problems and providing suitable work for low-attaining pupils have been satisfactorily resolved.

144. Teachers are suitably qualified and have a good range of relevant experience. Their good subject knowledge generally ensures that they plan lessons that match the needs of pupils well. The best lessons contain challenging activities, reflect high expectations of what pupils can do and lead to good learning. A top set in Year 9, for example, responded well to the brisk pace, increasing complexity of work and challenging questions. Occasionally, however, a few opportunities to extend high-attaining pupils are missed where questions do not contain that extra “twist” to extend learning yet more. On the other hand, pupils of average or below average attainment are sometimes set very challenging work that is too difficult for a significant minority of pupils, who then become restless and disruptive.

145. Methods of teaching include many clear demonstrations and explanations of mathematical skills and techniques. In the best lessons good questioning and well-managed discussion, where pupils are required to explain their thinking, develops well their understanding and confidence. In contrast, in several lessons teachers are too eager to tell pupils what to do or, by closed questions, lead pupils to the right

answer without their having to think much about it. The result in some lessons is a high dependence of pupils on their teachers. In a few lessons pupils make good progress because teachers alternate short bursts of teaching, during which well-posed questions help pupils to clarify their understanding, with tasks to be completed in a given time. This strategy is not used often enough as a means of increasing the rate of learning.

146. Skills and routines are generally practised effectively. Pupils are taught well to use them to tackle problems in everyday settings, especially in Years 10-11. Practical work is used effectively to help pupils to understand new ideas. For example, one of the upper sets in Year 9 was introduced to the standard trigonometrical ratios through accurate drawing and measuring of right-angled triangles. Skilful questioning enabled pupils to analyse their findings and reach the desired conclusions successfully.

147. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to investigate mathematical problems that require them to decide on lines of enquiry, justify their thinking and hypotheses and to reach general conclusions from their working. Several lessons begin with a puzzle that requires pupils to identify patterns and explain their reasons for predictions. Such strategies arouse pupils' interest and establish a positive climate for learning, although they are not used often enough.

148. Relationships between teachers and pupils are generally good. Teachers work hard to manage pupils' behaviour well and to ensure a calm climate for learning. The pace of lessons is satisfactory. Further improvement requires an extension of the range of teaching methods used successfully by some teachers into the repertoire of others - particularly by giving pupils tasks to do in a specified time and setting tasks that make pupils think rigorously about what they are learning.

149. The department is well organised and enthusiastically led. Teachers' morale is good. Resources are generally used well. The use of computers to enhance learning, a weakness identified in the previous report, has improved a little but is still below average. During lessons teachers make good, ongoing assessment of pupils' understanding and quickly clarify many misunderstandings. Formal written assessments are made with sufficient regularity. The marking of pupils' work is generally regular; brief encouraging comments are sometimes added, but challenging comments are rare. Pupils' attainment and progress are not clearly and consistently conveyed to pupils. Homework is set regularly in most classes and is generally tackled successfully.

150. Pupils' general standard of numeracy is broadly satisfactory and supports their learning in other subjects effectively. In science, for example, pupils handle numbers well and use a calculator sensibly. They use appropriate degrees of accuracy and relevant units of measurement, with correct abbreviations. In science, design and technology, geography and in GNVQ courses pupils draw and interpret appropriate graphs; where necessary, they recognise relationships between the variables. In design and technology pupils estimate and measure with reasonable accuracy and know the names and common properties of shapes. Most pupils use calculators well, but often rely too heavily upon them to perform trivial calculations that should be done mentally: for example, because mental arithmetic has not been taught sufficiently systematically, boys reached for a calculator to express  $30 \div 40$  as a decimal.

## **SCIENCE**

151. Pupils' overall level of attainment is consistently above that achieved nationally by pupils at the end of Key Stage 3. It is close to, and in most years slightly above, national norms at the end of Key Stage 4 in double award science and the three separate sciences of biology, chemistry and physics. There are variations in overall levels of attainment amongst the three sciences in the sixth form, but over the years attainment is generally close to the national average.

152. In the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2000 the percentages of pupils reaching the basic expected level or higher were well above the national average. They were very high when compared with those in schools serving similar localities. This achievement has been reached annually for the last six years. In 2000 47 per cent of pupils in this school achieved Level 6 or higher, compared with 30 per cent of pupils nationally.

153. Science is an important feature of the school's curriculum: a quarter of pupils are entered for the three separate sciences (on 30 per cent of curriculum time), approximately half for double award science (on 20 per cent of curriculum time) and a quarter for single award science (on 8-10 per cent of their time). Options chosen for each course are appropriately based on pupils' interest, aptitude and attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 and on predicted success. The grades obtained at the end of Key Stage 4 suitably reflect pupils' attainment two years previously. The presentation, style of layout and attention to detail in exercise books are at least satisfactory overall, but there is scope for improvement by establishing faculty-wide criteria of style and expectations. The graph work observed in several lessons shows that pupils have good working skills both in plotting and in interpreting information.

154. Physics results at GCSE have contained a large, above average proportion of the top A\* and A grades over the last few years. In biology and chemistry, whilst the proportion of A\*-C grades is around the national average, top grades do not feature as frequently as in physics. The school enters the majority of pupils for double award science: it annually achieves a proportion of A\*-C grades that is at least at the national average for this course (which is taken nationally by about four-fifths of 16 year olds). In this school a further 40-45 pupils annually achieve two or three grades at least at grade C in the separate sciences. Boys with identified educational needs and those who opt for the college-based, vocational course usually take single award science at the end of Key Stage 4: their success is generally commensurate with their ability and earlier attainment.

155. In the sixth form GCE A-level results in 2000 varied widely across the three sciences. The highest pass rate (92 per cent), including a quarter of entries at the highest A or B grades, was in physics, followed by chemistry at 86 per cent (but with no A or B grades) and biology with a low 54 per cent (but with one third of entries gaining grades A or B). Pupils' rate of progress from their earlier studies at GCSE level also varied widely amongst the 2000 examination cohort. The majority of pupils made satisfactory progress (the predominant mode in chemistry), but roughly equal proportions of pupils made good, satisfactory or unsatisfactory progress in biology and physics. Overall attainment on these sixth-form courses is in line with course requirements.

156. The success of physics at GCSE is carried over into the popularity of the subject in the sixth form. With the wider breadth of studies introduced in September 2000, 27 pupils are following the AS-course in physics in Year 12. This is a creditable achievement by the faculty and the physics department in particular. A successful BTEC course has run for many years: currently eight pupils from Year 13 at this school take this course within the Wallasey Sixth Form Consortium.

157. Teaching is good in Years 7-9 and the sixth form, sound in Years 10-11 and good overall. In all the lessons observed it was at least satisfactory and was good (occasionally very good) in half of them. Teachers are well qualified. They enthusiastically convey the interest they have in their subjects to pupils. Their lesson planning is satisfactory in Years 7-11 and good in the sixth form. The vast majority of lessons have clear objectives. When these are conveyed to pupils and implemented with a suitable variety of teaching methods, pupils learn with enthusiasm. They particularly appreciate teachers' inclusion of examples drawn from everyday life to illustrate scientific theories and applications - as, for example, in lessons on forces.

158. Teachers secure good progress in learning when simple, clear steps give pupils the opportunity to sample success several times in a lesson. In one well-planned lesson in Year 12 on radioactivity, for instance, pupils' interest was engaged by the use of a mind-mapping exercise and a subsequent link to a group knock-out challenge. As a result, pupils revised their earlier work well and checked out their understanding before adding new facts and concepts.

159. In Key Stage 3 pupils with special educational needs generally make good progress, especially when the steps in learning are small: in one lesson on moments and forces, for instance, they also made good gains in literacy and numeracy. The small size of groups for lower-attaining pupils in Key Stage 4 allows appropriate individual attention to be offered, with the result that pupils generally make sound progress.

160. In line with national developments in Years 7-11, teachers are increasingly refining investigative activities. In some lessons pupils use homework well to plan their investigations and then test their hypotheses in class - as, for example, the reaction of acids of varying concentrations and volumes on metals. Generally, however, pupils have insufficient opportunity to understand the meaning of, and to spell correctly, key scientific and technical words - at least to the good standard observed in a Year 8 class where pupils were able to distinguish between transparent, opaque and translucent, and applied them to new situations.

161. Books are marked and comments added to a broadly reasonable standard, although there are inconsistencies across the faculty in the methods and depth of doing this. When pupils (and especially those in top sets) are given the opportunity to explore the subtleties of scientific understanding, they appreciate the finer details, listen to one another's answers and views and contribute well to class discussion. This approach was a feature of several biology classes, for instance, but insufficient opportunities are built into lessons overall for pupils to express their own views and understanding of scientific concepts.

162. Pupils' attitudes to the subject are good. The vast majority of pupils respond instantly in class, during discussions and when approached as individuals. Behaviour in class is good. Girls that enter at sixth-form level are well integrated and contribute to the creation of a positive learning environment: work in a Year 12 chemistry lesson on enthalpy, for example, was enhanced by the interpretations they brought to the class.

163. The assessment of pupils' standards is well done. Their attainment is monitored against standardised tests and the results of these are used to check the progress of individual pupils. Pupils appreciate the existence of self-assessment review sheets: these cover all topics in Years 7-9, are well structured and are being trialled in the recently modified GCSE courses. The current approach and provision lead to a high take-up of the three sciences in Years 10-11.

164. Sufficient textbooks are available for use in class and also for long-term loan to some sets in Years 10-11. Facilities for ICT have improved to a reasonable level as a result of the recent acquisition of datalogging equipment. More computers are, however, required to provide ready access to a suitable range of facilities for the benefit of older pupils in particular. A suitable team of hard-working technicians makes an important contribution to the quality of teaching.

165. The faculty is well managed, given clear leadership and effectively coordinated. Teachers in the department work well together. The faculty's development plan is appropriately implemented and monitored. The issues identified at the last inspection for improvement have been addressed well. Staff are encouraged to attend professional training. The faculty's facilities are very good. It has been housed since autumn 2000 in a new purpose-built suite of 14 laboratories, with ample preparation facilities. Both teaching and non-teaching staff appreciate this accommodation and pupils state that this has boosted their interest in the subject. Laboratories have attractive displays of pupils' work, posters and information on scientific achievement.

166. A science club operates in lunchtimes every other week for younger boys. Key Stage 4 pupils are helped to find science-based work placements. There is scope to increase such activities, in order to raise the profile of the faculty and extend the scientific interest of the boys strongly into the sixth form. Pupils following A-level courses in the sciences speak convincingly of their career aspirations, which are well researched and realistic.

## **ART**

167. Teachers' assessments of pupils' work in the subject at the end of Year 9 indicate that the proportion of pupils who at least meet national expectations is slightly above the national average for all pupils and well above that for boys. The proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the range A\*-C in GCSE in 2000 was below the national average for all pupils, but above that for boys. The proportion of pupils gaining a grade between A\* and G was slightly below the national average. The department has been amongst the most successful of the school's departments in GCSE in the last three years and its results

reflect a steady improvement since the last inspection. All pupils who took GCE A-level in 2000 were awarded a pass, although their average points score was below the national average for the subject.

168. The work seen in the school during the inspection suggests that the higher standards of recent years are being at least maintained. By the end of both key stages pupils' overall level of attainment is close to average. Year 9 pupils, for example, have produced fine work based on the paintings of Seurat and Signac, demonstrating good painting technique and colour theory. Pupils exploit a variety of materials in their drawings, revealing considerable personal expression. The quality of much of their preparatory observational drawing, however, often lowers the quality of their finished work. Collages that inventively use tissue and other materials further reflect the creative efforts of pupils. Large cardboard sculptures based on animal and ethnic gods, alongside a bold display of sculptural drawings based on the Manhattan skyline, capture form, energy, movement and mass well. An exciting collection of work based on the architecture of the nearby St George's Hall leads to paintings with a strong classical feel.

169. In contrast, investigative work plays a far smaller part than aiming for finished work. Similarly, experimentation and research in sketchbooks are limited throughout the school. The resultant deficiencies are observed in both the GCSE course and sixth-form work. These underdeveloped observational drawing skills hinder pupils' progress and limit the development of their artistic ideas. There is, however, increasingly good exploration and investigation in Year 12, as pupils come to terms with the new AS examination. The technical art course is highly dependent on computer-generated imagery and photographic processes: on this course pupils' drawing and personal research are less good than their mastery of mechanical techniques. Critical studies, identified as a weakness in the previous report, are now central to the department's work. There is frequent use of secondary source materials of European and multi-cultural origin, developed in a personal way. Few pupils, however, remember the names of the artists whose work they have used.

170. Some very good work was observed during the inspection. In one very good lesson in Year 10, for example, pupils made great gains in knowledge when translating still-life drawings into large cardboard landscape reliefs. Pupils made very good physical and creative effort as they worked together and learned from one another. Another class, working with copper and aluminium, concentrated hard and made very good progress as they repeated methods they had been shown by a visiting artist.

171. Pupils' achievement in the subject is good overall. This represents a marked improvement since the last inspection. Achievement by the age of 13, taking into account the fact that pupils come to the school with a very mixed experience of the subject, is good. Achievement by the age of 16 is generally good. That in the sixth form is satisfactory.

172. Pupils in the department are well behaved. Good relationships between pupils and teachers are a strength of the department. Pupils show respect for one another, the subject and the fabric and materials of the department. Most pupils exercise initiative responsibly and reflect sensibly on their own and their classmates' efforts. Not all sixth formers, however, take sufficient initiative or responsibility for their work. A particular strength of the department is the good behaviour and commitment of many pupils who have been identified as having behavioural problems. These pupils form good, constructive relationships with teachers and classmates alike.

173. Teaching in the department is good overall and represents a significant improvement since the last inspection. The best teaching occurs in Years 7-11, where it is usually good and in a quarter of lessons very good. Teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory and occasionally good. Teachers' high insistence on good order underpins a strong, creative atmosphere. Their very good subject knowledge and a thoughtful use of resources have a significant, positive impact on pupils. Teachers relate well to their pupils and show great care for them.

174. In the best lessons there are high expectations of good standards, behaviour and effort. The result is that teaching has a very strong impact on pupils and they learn in depth. In these classes pupils are encouraged to express and share opinions with one another through discussion. Teachers circulate, assessing work, offering assistance and making good use of the names of artists and subject-specific words. In the sixth form, teachers have a very open and experimental approach to the challenge of the



new AS-level course. Indeed, challenge is an integral and ever-present ingredient in the department's approach.

175. Another notable feature of the department is the way potentially difficult classes are managed. In these classes, generally comprising lower-attaining pupils, teachers usually closely match their expectations to pupils' capabilities and engage them in work that is suitably practical and rigorous. In less successful lessons planning is weak and pupils spend time, without profit, in merely copying sentences or images from a worksheet. Some lessons depend too much on pupils' imagination and not enough on their personal research and development work. The quality of classroom support and assistance is varied: it often reinforces and supports pupils and their teacher, but at other times plays an unsatisfactory, inactive role.

176. Many lessons begin with discussions. In these pupils make constructive contributions and teachers review previous learning. Pupils show interest and are keen to do well and impress their teacher. They are proud of their work. In some classes, from Year 7 onwards, there is insufficient development of basic skills and processes and slightly too much emphasis on glossy, finished work. During the inspection there was a noticeable lack of ambition and curiosity in one Year 13 lesson when not all pupils were fully prepared, involved or extended.

177. The curriculum is particularly broad. It offers a range of experiences in two and three dimensions throughout the school in painting and drawing, printmaking, sculpture, graphics, textiles, photography and critical studies. Statutory requirements are met. There are opportunities for much independent learning in all years, a great improvement since the last inspection. There is no departmental policy to guide work with pupils who have special educational needs. These pupils receive a very good education in the department, particularly in Years 10-11, but staff are not always aware of the details of their special needs: the teaching of these children therefore depends almost entirely upon the personalities of the teaching staff rather than a concerted policy. In contrast, there is insufficient consideration for the needs of the gifted and talented pupils: these pupils have the opportunity to work in the department after school or during lunchtimes, but homework (in particular) does not sufficiently stretch their capabilities.

178. Teaching time in Years 7-9 has been extended since the last report and the extra time has allowed more thorough coverage of critical studies. Information and communication technology is in its infancy within the subject. Although the department has a computer and art software, its use is very limited, although improved since the last inspection. The assessment of pupils' standards is slightly generous at the end of Year 9: the GCSE results two years later gained by those pupils who opt for the subject do not reflect a comparable success rate.

179. The subject makes a major contribution to pupils' substantial personal development. Staff are good role models and have high personal standards. Pupils' work exhibited around the buildings makes a significant contribution to the cultural life of the school. Regular visits to galleries and stately homes in the region and beyond give pupils the opportunity to experience works of art at first hand.

180. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. Leadership is very strong and more effective than some aspects of management. The monitoring of teaching, for example, is informal and infrequent and fails to allow skilful teaching methods to be shared. Planning insufficiently considers the implications of finance, staffing, time and other resources. The accommodation is new and much improved since the last inspection. Learning resources, identified as inadequate in the last inspection, are good. They are particularly good for photography and the more technical processes used in art.

181. At the time of the last inspection achievement was well below the national average. It is now average. Attainment at GCSE was well below average, but is now close to average. The progress of pupils up to Year 11 was limited by their lack of skills and poor knowledge of the work of artists. This, too, is much improved. There is, however, room for further improvement in this aspect and for an increase in pupils' personal research, particularly in sketchbooks. Opportunities for independent learning were limited, but are now satisfactory. Expectations amongst both pupils and teachers have been raised and time is now used effectively. The greatest improvement has, however, been in the quality of teaching. At

the last inspection, for example, more than half the teaching was unsatisfactory in Years 10-11. None of that seen during this inspection was unsatisfactory. The department has made good progress in recent years. It is a stimulating and rewarding place for pupils.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

182. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' overall level of attainment is average. Almost all pupils achieve the expected level for their age and a minority achieve more. Teachers' assessments of pupils' work over the 1998-2000 period show that there has been a significant improvement in pupils' attainment to reach this average overall standard.

183. From the evidence of design work and practical projects pupils' attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 is average and reflects accurately teachers' assessments in 2000. Work in resistant materials is average and often based on imaginative, practical tasks. In food studies pupils learn, for instance, to estimate and weigh accurately, to prepare and bake such items as flapjacks, and to evaluate their own and other pupils' results. This is a comparatively new aspect of the subject in this school, but boys have quickly acquired sound knowledge, skills and understanding.

184. Attainment in graphic products varies from below to above average, but is average overall. The best work occurs where pupils are allowed to look beyond stereotypical ideas of menu designs and be innovative. Attainment in groups of pupils with special educational needs is below average overall, but varies from average to below average, often depending on the amount of support available and the teachers' understanding of pupils' literacy and other needs. Pupils' attainment in the understanding and application of ICT is average.

185. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils' performance in their chosen specialism is generally above average. Over the period 1998-1999 the proportion of pupils gaining grades in the range A\*-C in GCSE was well above the national average, although slightly below it in 2000; that of pupils gaining grades in the range A\*-G was above average. In 2000 just one pupil gained the highest A\* grade. Pupils' overall level of performance in this subject was significantly above what they achieved in most of their other subjects in 1998 and 1999, although not in 2000 where weaknesses in work on resistant materials adversely affected results. The most successful aspect is graphic products.

186. Current work in the GCSE courses in Years 10 and 11 in graphics products and resistant materials is above average overall. Year 10 pupils, for example, demonstrate high standards of practical competence and precision in planning and designing a storage unit for CDs and in evaluating the strengths and weaknesses of commercially produced travel games. Year 11 pupils show good knowledge and understanding and strong design potential as they plan for their major project - on architectural modelling, for instance, or plastic extrusion for an electronic aid such as a mobile phone. Their numeracy skills are adequate for the tasks they undertake. Higher attainers show good understanding of computer-generated design.

187. By the end of the sixth form pupils' attainment is generally in line with course requirements. Girls join the course at this stage and are sensitively integrated into the system. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher (A-B) grades at GCE A-level over the period 1998-1999 was above the national average, but below it in 2000, whilst the proportion of those passing the subject is at least slightly below average in these years. Of those taking A-level in 2000 about a quarter made good progress, a further quarter satisfactory progress, but nearly half made unsatisfactory progress from the standard they had reached in their earlier GCSE examinations.

188. Current work in the sixth form is above average overall. Pupils in Year 12, for example, in developing ideas for a sundial, showed good knowledge and understanding of a range of engineering, wood and metal processes. Internet sources have been carefully accessed for design ideas and sound mathematical knowledge and understanding of angles are evident in planning sheets. Year 13 pupils made notes relevantly and efficiently, using bullet points, although only a few took an active part in discussion about modern designers such as Dyson. Business students make a significant contribution,

revealing pertinent knowledge and interest in concept cars as well as views concerning, for instance, the diminishing role of the public telephone box.

189. Pupils generally learn well in Years 7-9 and learn even better in Years 9-11. Progress is good in such designing and making tasks as the spinning top in Year 7 and the structural project in Year 8. It is very good in Years 10-11 and satisfactory overall in the sixth form. Pupils in Key Stage 3 read the worksheets provided for them with little difficulty, but rarely read aloud, because teachers do not often consciously recognise the importance of such opportunities. In both key stages 35-minute lessons lead to little time for thinking and reflecting on questions asked or for engaging in lengthy discussion. Similarly, follow-up tasks are limited by the time available.

190. In Key Stage 3 substantial use is made of ICT to achieve a good standard in word processing, graphics and databases. In Key Stage 4 and the sixth form good use is made of computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) to realise and extend designs and to demonstrate understanding of industrial processes and applications.

191. Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development are very good throughout the school. Pupils are punctual to lessons, are generally well prepared and are keen to learn. They listen well and apply themselves to practical tasks with enthusiasm and commitment. The exception is where pupils work in a room that is not suitable for the purpose. Year 7 pupils respond well to the challenges offered and work at a good pace throughout lessons. Year 8 pupils work well together in groups to solve problems. Pupils in Year 9 enjoy the opportunity to estimate and then check their estimation by, for example, weighing a variety of foodstuffs. Talk in lessons is usually about the task being undertaken: older pupils talk enthusiastically about their projects, often explaining where ideas have originated and possible pitfalls.

192. The quality of teaching is a considerable strength. It is always at least satisfactory, was at least good in nine-tenths of the lessons seen and very good (on one occasion excellent) in about three-fifths of the lessons. Teachers are well qualified and have very good subject knowledge and understanding. Their particular strength, however, lies in their united team approach to discipline, planning and assessment. Work is well marked and incorporates helpful written comments. Humour is well used to relieve any tension and to raise pupils' self-esteem.

193. In contrast, the teaching of literacy is not strong. In a few instances there is insufficient importance placed by individual teachers on pupils' paper work. Key technical words are displayed, but often on coloured paper and in typefaces that are not easy for pupils to read. Dictionaries are provided, but not often used. The result of this uncoordinated approach to literacy is that pupils' standards of written work (including spelling, punctuation and presentation) vary greatly at all stages of the school. Variations also occur in the standards adopted for drawing tasks - as, for example, in the use of drawing boards to avoid working on rough surfaces.

194. In the single periods of 35 minutes, teachers are under considerable pressure to complete tasks, whilst also recognising that good teaching methodology requires them to involve pupils fully and actively in their learning through such means as group work and brainstorming. During the inspection the best practice was seen in a double lesson where such interactive learning methods were fully exploited.

195. The subject meets statutory requirements. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Documentation is of generally excellent quality and underpins departmental practice. The major missing elements are policy statements for work with gifted and talented pupils and for ways of promoting pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education through the subject. Most workshops are stimulating places to learn and have good displays of pupils' work. Good progress has been made in addressing the weaknesses that were noted at the last inspection.

196. The technician provides valuable support in the workshops and also in helping to organise a very successful Karting Club - an activity that has been featured in the national press. Pupils, teachers and parents give freely of their time by servicing the vehicles and attending the eight meetings per year at karting tracks around the country.

197. There are currently several unresolved issues that impact adversely on the working practices of both teachers and pupils. These include the preponderance of single periods, the shortage of a workshop, the lack of being networked to the Internet and problems with heating, dust and water seepage.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

198. Pupils' overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with the national expectation for the subject. When teachers assessed pupils' work at the end of Year 9 in 2000, results indicated that pupils' attainment was in line with the national average for all pupils and above the national average for boys. In the previous three years results suggested that attainment was well above the national norm for boys.

199. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils' overall level of attainment is close to average. Results in GCSE in 2000 were, however, well below the average achieved by boys nationally. During the last five years the level of attainment has declined from above the national average in 1996 to well below the national average in 2000. Few pupils achieve the highest A\*-A grades. The pupils' performance in the subject in the last three years has been below what they achieved in most of their other subjects in the school. During the inspection pupils worked at an overall level close to, but slightly below, the national expectation.

200. GCE A-level results were in line with the national average in 2000 and have improved steadily during the last four years. The department reviews all examination results carefully each year and has recently implemented ways of raising attainment, particularly in the GCSE examination, that focus on the coursework element of the syllabus.

201. Pupils in Years 7-11 have a satisfactory knowledge of the subject, but their understanding of how geographical features are formed and change is weak. They have a satisfactory knowledge of what landscape features, urban areas and different environments are like, but their understanding of the reasons for them are not secure. They have a satisfactory knowledge of what geographical terms mean, but rarely use them in oral or written work. Pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of what places they have studied are like, but have an unsatisfactory knowledge of where they are. In Years 12-13 pupils have a good knowledge of the local area. In one lesson, for example, pupils in Year 13 used their good knowledge of the local area to discuss fluently the geographical implications and likely response of the local people to a major building development on nearby land.

202. Pupils extract information effectively from written resource material, but often copy this straight down rather than using or incorporating their own words. Written work is generally accurate, but presentation is often untidy and handwriting lacks clarity. When given the opportunity, higher-attaining pupils produce extended pieces of written work that are imaginative and geographically sound. One group of pupils in Year 8, for example, wrote enthusiastically about life in the equatorial rainforest, accurately describing the climate, the vegetation and the life of the people who live there. Such opportunities are rare. In Years 10-11 pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of the fieldwork process of collecting and analysing information and of drawing conclusions. Throughout the school they have sound numerical skills, using numerical data to draw and analyse a narrow range of graphs accurately.

203. The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall throughout the school, but has weaknesses - although half is good in Key Stage 3. Teachers have a sound knowledge of the subject. They give clear and well-structured explanations, pitched at an appropriate level, and provide suitable illustrative examples to help pupils to understand. They are keen to establish a knowledge of geographical terms: they present good role models by using them in discussion, especially with the sixth form, but they do not make sufficient use of the key-word lists displayed in all classrooms. Lessons are always well prepared and organised, so they start briskly and promptly and proceed smoothly. The materials used are generally of good quality, but too little use is made of visual material and, when it is available (as in a textbook), it is not referred to effectively. Teachers' relationships with pupils are good. They know pupils well and quickly establish a positive working atmosphere.

204. Lessons are planned with clear objectives. They are, however, invariably didactic: the teacher leads the discussion, but there is little involvement of more than a minority of pupils. Stimulating audio-visual material is rarely used. Pupils work as a class and there is very little paired or group work. Lessons lack a variety of approach: pupils invariably take notes, copy work or write answers to questions from a worksheet or the board. They are not given the opportunity to use the knowledge they gain in a new, challenging context. Progress in extending knowledge is satisfactory, but pupils make slow progress in deepening their understanding or explaining the reasons for the features they are studying. Marking is up to date, but is often superficial in Years 7-11 and lacks constructive comments, so that pupils have little indication of whether they are succeeding or what they must do to improve.

205. Pupils assimilate information quickly. They work hard to complete the work set and are generally willing to be involved in lessons. They listen attentively and maintain concentration throughout. In only a few of the best lessons, however, do they have the opportunity to display their learning skills. In one good lesson, for instance, lower-attaining pupils with special educational needs in Year 7 used the information they had collected for homework to conduct a census within their own class. All of the pupils were interested and fully involved, making good contributions to the discussion, swiftly and effectively moving around collecting and tabulating information from other pupils. They then worked hard to use the information to produce graphs from which they could draw conclusions. They maintained a good focus on their work throughout and, as a result, made good progress.

206. Pupils generally have a positive attitude to the subject. They are invariably well behaved and listen attentively. In the sixth form they are keen and well motivated: they work together very effectively in pairs or in groups and are willing to enter into discussion.

207. The scheme of work fully complies with national requirements, but does not indicate either the progression of content or the potential of varied teaching approaches. As reported previously, there is still insufficient use of ICT in the subject. An appropriate programme of assessment has been developed, and this is being implemented, using valid and worthwhile assessment tasks. The results are not recorded centrally, however, and the information is not used systematically to support individual pupils or for curricular planning.

208. There is no systematic monitoring of the effectiveness of the department's policies or teaching. The staff are all well qualified and, with the exception of a newly qualified teacher, experienced; many have major responsibilities in the school. There is adequate timetabled time, but the school's framework of 35-minute lessons makes it difficult for teachers to develop the breadth and depth of work. The subject is accommodated in two parts of the school with adjacent rooms. One is in an old block of the school which, despite the best efforts of the staff to improve their environment, is poor. There are firm plans to replace this accommodation during the next academic year. The department has generally adequate resources, but lacks sufficient textbooks in Years 10-11 for pupils to use them for homework. It has insufficient audio-visual equipment.

209. There is currently no head of department, but the school has firm plans to appoint to this post from September 2001. At present the department lacks a clear sense of direction. There is no systematic monitoring of the department's work, the GCSE results and quality of the teaching have declined, and little progress has been made since the last inspection. The staff of the department are hard-working and committed to raising standards, but, until there is clear guidance and leadership, the subject does not have the capacity to make a significant improvement.

## **HISTORY**

210. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' overall level of attainment is a little above average. Most pupils begin Year 7 in line with the national average. Teachers assessed their pupils as being above the national average in both 1999 and 2000 by the end of Year 9. The overall standard of work seen during the inspection was a little above what is typical nationally, although only a small proportion of pupils reach the highest standards. Pupils with special educational needs achieve appropriate standards and make good progress. The vast majority of pupils reach a standard at the end of Year 9 that is at least in line with their earlier attainment.

211. Pupils in Years 7-9 see the causes of past events and successfully explain the reasons for actions taken by people in the past - as, for example, in a lesson in which pupils in Year 8 evaluated the likely success of actions taken to try to prevent the spread of plague in London in 1665. They use a range of sources successfully to describe the past. A small number of higher attainers successfully evaluate the reliability and usefulness of historical sources. Many pupils write well at length - as, for instance, in essays by pupils in Year 9 on the potential of the tank as a weapon of war.

212. Pupils taking the GCSE course in Key Stage 4 reach an overall standard that is in line with the national average, a standard similar to that reported at the time of the last inspection. In 1999 the percentage of pupils gaining grades A\*-C was a little above the average for that proportion of pupils entered nationally for the examination; in 2000 it was well above average. The percentage of pupils gaining A and A\* grades was well above average in 2000, having been below average for the previous three years. In 2000 the overall performance of pupils in the subject was significantly better than in most of their other subjects.

214. The overall standard of work seen in Key Stage 4 was in line with the national average. Pupils taking GCSE have sound knowledge and understanding of the topics they study. In a lesson on the reasons for the Cold War, for example, pupils in a Year 11 group successfully identified reasons for the respective fears of Russia and the USA. Pupils use sources well to explain the past. Pupils in Year 11, for instance, used a range of sources to identify reasons why men volunteered for the army in 1914-1915. The highest attainers successfully evaluated the usefulness of a photographic source as evidence.

215. The standard reached by pupils taking A-level is broadly in line with course requirements. Although the number of pupils gaining a pass grade at A-level in 2000 was below the national average, the proportion who gained grades A or B was well above average, as it was in 1999. The standards of work seen during the inspection were broadly average for pupils in the sixth form. Pupils understand and explain the reasons for events in the past - as, for example in work on the reasons for the mass murder of Jews in Germany in World War II. They use sources competently for evidence to build up their own views of past events. Pupils in Year 13 put forward cogent and well-substantiated views on the reasons for the rise of fascism in Italy and Germany in the 1930s.

216. The quality of teaching is good overall. Four-fifths of the teaching is good. It is a little better in Years 7-9 and in the sixth form than in Years 10-11 (where it is satisfactory overall). The overall standard is an improvement on that reported at the last inspection. Teachers know their subject well - and in considerable depth for sixth-form work - and communicate it effectively. As a result, pupils acquire good knowledge and understanding about the past.

217. Teachers have appropriately high expectations of pupils and set suitable work that challenges the highest-attaining pupils and allows them to work at a high standard. In a Year 9 lesson, for example, pupils were asked to reconstruct, through role play in small groups, the discussion amongst the Great Powers at the end of World War I about the future of Europe and the treatment of Germany, and to compare their decisions with those actually made in 1919. The work set for pupils with special educational needs is suitably challenging for their ability. In a lesson on the battle of the Somme, for example, a group of pupils with special needs was asked to compare the actual events of the battle with the plans and to explain what went wrong. A guidance sheet provided by the teacher helped them to record their findings.

218. An appropriate variety of teaching methods, including individual study, work in pairs or groups and whole-class discussion, ensures that pupils have good opportunities to learn in a range of different ways. In a small minority of lessons teachers talk for too long or do not allow pupils to answer in depth or at length. This restricts opportunities for pupils to develop as effective learners. Teachers manage their pupils well, with a firm but friendly approach, and deal effectively with the small number of pupils who behave badly and try to prevent other pupils from learning.

219. Most pupils show interest in, and commitment to, their work. Most clearly want to achieve good standards and work hard to do so. As a result, they make good progress in acquiring new knowledge and understanding. Work in pairs or groups is done with good cooperation and tolerance. Pupils listen to their teachers' instructions and most concentrate well on their work. The behaviour of the vast majority is good, and often very good. A very small number of pupils in Key Stage 3 display a reluctance to work or to cooperate with their teachers.

220. The subject meets the statutory teaching requirements for Key Stage 3. The leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. There is a clear commitment to maintaining the above average attainment in public examinations and there is a good ethos for learning in lessons. The present arrangement of the rotation of three teachers leading the department for a term each has contributed to developmental planning that is short-term only and to the lack of effective monitoring of teaching. There are plans to change this arrangement in the near future. The accommodation is of poor quality and, despite teachers' attempts to improve the surroundings, provides an uninspiring environment in which to work. There are insufficient books for pupils in Years 7-11. Pupils often have to share books in class and cannot take them home for study. The lack of any up-to-date computers in the department is a weakness. The limited availability of centrally provided ICT at times suitable to the department restricts the use of ICT to enhance pupils' learning.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

221. The previous inspection reported that there was insufficient provision for such aspects of ICT as measurement and control and that pupils had few opportunities to work together in groups. These are now in place. Other identified weaknesses were the lack of use of ICT in subject departments, few computers and the lack of technician support. Satisfactory progress has now been made in planning for coverage of ICT, the provision of networked computers and technician support. Weaknesses, however, still exist in the teaching, availability and use of ICT in other subjects. Following delays in the completion of the new teaching rooms and ongoing teething problems with the installation of new equipment, the school is now poised to move positively forward in implementing a whole-school approach to the use of ICT by providing better learning opportunities in individual subject departments. Statutory requirements are met.

222. At the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is broadly average. Many pupils are familiar with computers through home usage. Their regular ICT lessons equip them well to word process, to handle data and spreadsheets and to use software for control and graphics. Good features of the department's work are the regularly planned assessments (including self-assessment) of pupils' attainment and coverage of work that guide pupils' learning and raise their standards appropriately.

223. The assessments of pupils' work made by teachers at the end of Year 9 in 2000 indicated that the proportion of pupils achieving Levels 5 or 6 was well above the national average. Inspection data do not support this high assessment: pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are close to the level expected nationally. Whilst good opportunities are provided for pupils to apply ICT to the outside world through the astronomical telescope project, there are still insufficient opportunities for pupils to practise and enhance their ICT skills in their other school subjects.

224. Pupils with special educational needs are not sufficiently considered in the planning of work. As a result, pupils often find the worksheets too difficult to read and become confused by the different use of terminology in ICT and mathematics. Letter-writing in Year 8 is not linked with pupils' work in English: as a discrete activity it has limited value in improving pupils' literacy.

225. Pupils' overall attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is average. In Years 10-11 the teaching of ICT is mapped out across other subjects of the curriculum and teachers are encouraged to book specialist rooms, where they are well supported by technical help. A certificate of achievement is awarded at this key stage, but there is no GCSE accreditation. The highest attainment in ICT is in the application of computer-aided design and manufacture (CAD/CAM) in design and technology, and in composition and notation in music. Satisfactory progress in implementing ICT has been made in modern foreign languages and PE, but ICT has had little impact on the attainment of pupils in English, mathematics, science, art, geography, history and RE. The lack of networking in shared areas such as the library limits

opportunities for Internet research. The school has no provision for video-conferencing with its external industrial contacts such as Lairdside.

226. In the sixth form the proportion of pupils gaining the higher (A-B) grades or passing the subject at GCSE A-level was well below the national average in 1999 and 2000, but above average in 1998. Pupils in the sixth form currently following the GCE A-level course have an average standard in skill and a sound knowledge, understanding and ability to apply their knowledge to the outside world, but they are often too dependent on their teacher and are reluctant to initiate and participate actively in discussion. The lack of networking for computers in the sixth-form block limits opportunities for research and electronic conferencing with other schools. The current provision disadvantages pupils studying at this level.

227. Throughout the school pupils enjoy their lessons. They generally approach their work with enthusiasm, although the shape of the specialist rooms limits opportunities for group work away from computers for such purposes as brainstorming or planning. Pupils generally work at a good pace. They cooperate well with their teachers and one another. Pupils have good opportunities to reflect on the quality of their work. The temptation to handle the keyboard or mouse rather than to listen to instructions is often too much for groups of pupils with special educational needs; learning slows when there is no support assistant present.

228. The quality of the specialist teaching of ICT is always at least satisfactory throughout the school: during the inspection two-thirds of that inspected was satisfactory, a quarter was good and one lesson was very well taught. Specialist teachers have deep knowledge and understanding of the subject. They set high and generally realistic targets and give skilled individual support. Teachers and learning assistants work well together. Specialist teachers do not, however, provide appropriate worksheets for pupils with literacy or numeracy problems. Reference is not always made to spelling lists of technical terms.

229. Relationships between teachers and pupils are generally good. Specialist teachers encourage pupils to become independent in the way they learn. They give good support by way of oral and written feedback to individuals; this helps pupils to improve their learning and attainment. Many staff in other subjects are not confident enough in using ICT: whilst training is in hand, it had had limited impact by the time of the inspection.

230. The coordination of the specialist ICT teaching is good and the documentation produced by the department is excellent. There is a gap however, between intention and practice in two aspects - in the use of ICT across all subjects in Years 7-11 and in the planning for pupils with special educational needs in Years 7-9. The assessment of pupils' attainment within the ICT department is a strong feature. Insufficient attention has, however, been given to mapping curricular and assessment opportunities across all subjects and moderating the results to give an accurate level of pupils' attainment in ICT. The result is an over-generous assessment of pupils' attainment. Teaching time for ICT in Key Stage 3 is low. The new network, benching and ventilation pose unresolved problems. There are insufficient LCD projectors for teaching purposes within specialist rooms.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

231. Pupils' overall level of attainment in French by the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with the national average. Teachers' assessments for the end of this key stage in both 1999 and 2000 also indicated that pupils' overall attainment was close to the national average. German is introduced to most pupils as a second modern foreign language in Year 9 and this has recently been extended to Year 8: the inevitably lower overall level of attainment is appropriate for the amount of time the subject has been studied.

233. By the end of Year 9 pupils' understanding of both languages is generally satisfactory. In French it is better in classes where teachers use the language more extensively and consistently. Pupils' oral skills are of a reasonable standard, because in many lessons teachers pay particular attention to pronunciation. When utterances are short, pupils are sometimes challenged to extend them, but this is not done consistently across the department. In a Year 7 French lesson, for instance, pupils extended their competence in expressing opinions about school subjects because of their teacher's clear



encouragement to do so. In addition, they consolidated their learning of vocabulary and sentence construction by the use of a rap rhythm. The lowest-attaining pupils with special educational needs in Year 7 made suitable progress by taking part in role-play in a restaurant, briefly ordering from memory something to eat and drink and observing the common courtesies.

234. In their written work pupils generally complete word lists and exercises to a reasonable standard. This writing is sometimes, however, helped along by too many English meanings - as, for instance, when pupils expressed opinions about school subjects. In French, pupils use the past tense in Years 8 and 9 competently overall. Occasionally, pupils produce extended pieces of writing in the foreign languages through well-constructed exercises (based around "writing frames"), but written exercises are not generally extended into short paragraphs of continuous writing.

235. In 1999 and 2000 the proportion of pupils attaining a grade in the range A\*-C in French in the full-course GCSE examination was below the national average for all pupils, but was only fractionally below the national average for boys. All pupils entered for the examination in 2000 attained a grade in the range A\*-G; the proportion doing so in 1999 was above the national average. The proportion of pupils entered for the examination has increased in each of the last three years. In German, the proportion of pupils attaining grades A\*-C was above the national average for all pupils in 2000 and just below it in 1999. The proportion gaining grades A\*-C was above the national average for boys in both years. All pupils entered for the examination in German also attained grades A\*-G.

236. At the end of Key Stage 4 the overall standard of attainment in French and German is average. Pupils make broadly satisfactory progress overall in understanding and using an appropriate range of speaking skills in both languages. In French, however, last year's GCSE examination revealed that this was pupils' weakest skill overall. In their conversations with the French assistante during the inspection average-attaining pupils talked about past events, but often required prompting. In a Year 11 French class pupils answered a range of questions, but many had difficulty in asking questions. In a Year 11 German class, in contrast, pupils talked confidently about what they done the previous weekend.

237. The quality of pupils' written work varies considerably. It is average overall, but some well-crafted and thoughtful examples were seen. Higher-attaining pupils in German in Year 10, for example, produced brochures about Wirral that were very well illustrated, amusing and interesting. They showed a sound knowledge of different tenses and of inversion. In formal letters to hotels or camp-sites lower-attaining pupils in Year 11 displayed good knowledge of the relevant vocabulary and wrote with reasonable accuracy. Work produced by a Year 11 French class about holidays, under examination conditions, showed that they had acquired a good knowledge of the relevant vocabulary, of time phrases and of different tenses. Higher-attaining pupils are more consistently accurate.

238. There is, however, room for greater accuracy in written work in both key stages. Although pupils are given good guidance by teachers about their written work in both languages, they too infrequently complete the corrections of their mistakes. There is also room for improvement throughout the school in the presentation of written work.

239. In the sixth form only small groups study French or German. The proportion of these pupils who have attained passes in the GCE A-level examination over the last three years is below the national average in French and above it in German. The number of passes at the higher (A and B) grades was in line with the national average in French, but below it in German. Attainment by the end of Year 13 is average overall in both French and German. Understanding of the foreign languages is sound. Pupils work from authentic materials and discuss the topics satisfactorily. Pupils in Year 12, for instance, have a sound understanding of the French educational system, ably assisted by a bilingual pupil from Year 10. In a German lesson in Year 13 pupils showed good background knowledge and relevant vocabulary in their topic on guest-workers and asylum-seekers in Germany.

240. Overall, pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good (and sometimes very good). They respond well to chorus-work in class, generally listen carefully and apply themselves well to tasks. They work sensibly together when paired work is introduced. In a minority of lessons, however, they remain passive when they are unchallenged by their teacher or when they do not give the teacher their full attention.

241. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Teaching in two of the lessons observed in both key stages and in the sixth form, comprising about a quarter of all teaching seen, was good. The best lessons include a high level of use of the foreign languages in class: this helps significantly to raise pupils' understanding. Most lessons begin with revision of work from the previous lesson and this helps pupils to focus their minds. In a few lessons learning objectives are clearly shared with the class. Some teaching has high expectations and helps pupils to consolidate and extend their work considerably. In a Year 10 French class, for instance, the teacher challenged pupils well with the introduction of new vocabulary. Each pupil had to repeat his sentence around the class in a race against the clock; this generated an appropriately brisk pace. Good use is made of resources - and particularly of the overhead projector, flash cards and worksheets.

242. In a minority of lessons, however, there are weaknesses in teaching. Sometimes there is over-direction by teachers and not enough use made of the foreign languages. This results in a lack of challenge to pupils. This is often also the case after chorus-work, when, for instance, the phrase or construction used is not consolidated by being repeated to the class by individual pupils. In such classes teachers' expectations are too limited. Teachers do not always secure the full attention of all the class. Suitable opportunities for paired work are sometimes missed. A final whole-class evaluation of what has been learned in the lesson is not infrequently impeded by inadequate planning of the use of time or by the short lesson-time available.

243. The management of pupils in class is good in nearly all lessons. Appropriate homework is set regularly, but the marking of pupils' work is irregular and inconsistent across the department. Numeracy is used well in many lessons in both oral and written work.

244. The department meets the statutory requirement to teach the National Curriculum programmes of study. Steps have already been taken to comply with the new national orders for the subject. Although the time available for the study of the second language has been increased by the introduction of German into Year 8, it is still limited. Information and communication technology is used appropriately in Year 10 in both languages. Suitable software has been purchased for use with other years.

245. The management of the department, in the absence of the head of faculty on a two-year secondment, is broadly satisfactory. The two acting heads of faculty (one for each language) have worked very hard and received good support from other members of the department. Monitoring of the department's work is, however, inadequate. National Curriculum levels of attainment are not used as the basis of pupils' assessment in Key Stage 3: pupils are therefore unaware of their rate of progress. Good use is made of the foreign language assistants.

246. Two of the teachers have recently started to help with a language club at a local contributory primary school. Foreign trips, work experience abroad and good displays in classrooms enhance the overall provision for the subject. The department's progress since the last inspection has been satisfactory overall.

## **MUSIC**

247. By the end of Key Stage 3 the overall attainment of pupils is broadly in line with the national average. Pupils perform, compose and improvise on electronic keyboards where, for example, they play a diatonic five-note melody which "fits" the fingers. Most pupils read staff notation, although with varying degrees of fluency: most have a fair knowledge of notes on the music keyboard, although letter names are indicated on the instruments. At this stage pupils also learn primary chords which most of them produce by using the "auto-chord" facility on the keyboard. A high proportion use chord changes correctly with reasonable rhythmic accuracy. Pupils also learn about the main musical periods and styles - as, for example, Elizabethan music, music of the classical period and twentieth-century popular and jazz styles.

248. Pupils' overall level of attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is in line with the national average. In the 1999 and 2000 GCSE results, taken together, 14 out of 23 pupils gained grades in the range A\*-C. Two of these gained A\* grades. In work seen during the inspection the overall standard of performance, composition and listening was average. In one lesson pupils listened to samples of minimalist music by

Reich and Glass, made a simple analysis of the structure of the pieces, and then used the material and structure for their own compositions. Examples of work on tape and manuscript represent a satisfactory understanding and mastery of the composition of songs, keyboard pieces and pieces for small ensemble. Pupils make good use of the computer and computerised components of electronic keyboards to formulate, shape and record their compositions.

249. Only two pupils in Year 13 are at present taking GCE A-level. In Year 12 seven pupils are following the AS-level syllabus, with the option of taking the follow-on, A2-level next year. Due to the small numbers involved and the changing syllabus, it is inappropriate to form a judgement of pupils' attainment compared with a national average. A judgement of their progress is given below.

250. The quality of learning in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory overall. Pupils enter the school with a broadly average level of educational attainment, but with a wide range of musical attainment and experience. Many pupils, including some in the Year 7 classes who have special educational needs, are quick learners at music. In some classes in both Years 8 and 9 there is a significant minority of pupils who do not concentrate well; they are easily distracted to the extent that they slow down the progress of the whole class. In spite of the problems that these pupils cause, most pupils make satisfactory gains in acquiring new knowledge about music, extend their listening and playing skills, develop a growing understanding of how music is structured and appreciate its affective qualities.

251. Most pupils are interested in their lessons and work hard to improve. Some especially good learning was observed in a class in Year 7, where pupils were introduced to, and taught about, the brass family of instruments. In this lesson a very good illustration of vibrating tubing was presented to the pupils, who touched the tubing to feel the vibrations and quickly understood that longer columns of air produce lower sounds. Over Years 7-9 most pupils increase their knowledge, understanding and skills well, albeit at different rates. They learn common musical forms - as, for example, the 12-bar blues and how melody "fits" with harmony.

252. In Key Stage 4 the majority of pupils learn well and make good progress. In this stage the requirements of the GCSE course motivate pupils well to reach the required standards in performing, composing and musical understanding. There are 40 pupils studying the subject in the present Year 10 - a significant increase of candidates. During the inspection these pupils were studying improvisation soundly by building up a blues scale in three different keys, reading a syncopated rhythm and fitting phrases to the rhythm. Through Years 10-11 their overall interest in musical forms develops well and they acquire a working terminology and a good background knowledge to analyse and use form, instrumentation and expressiveness in their own pieces. Pupils with special educational needs in Key Stages 3 and 4 learn well and make good progress.

253. In the sixth form pupils learn well. The curriculum, which is determined by external examination requirements, is demanding, especially in respect of aural perception. By Year 13 pupils learn to listen analytically to a piece of music: in a section of eighteenth century opera, for example, they identify the instrumentation, harmonic structure and vocal texture of the work. They also develop a keen sense of evaluation of their own performances. In one lesson, for instance, pupils accurately marked a piece performed by a member of the group, taking careful account of the examination criteria. Almost all pupils taking the subject in the sixth form have a mature attitude to self-criticism that helps them to identify areas in which they need to improve.

254. Overall, pupils' attitudes to learning are good throughout the school. Most are interested in the subject and work with sustained effort. In spite of the disenchantment of a significant minority of pupils, particularly in Year 9, attitudes to work and behaviour develop well over the period of school life. Behaviour is good in the majority of lessons and most pupils form good relationships with one another and their teachers. In a minority of classes small groups of pupils quickly lose concentration and try to distract their peers. Mostly, however, teachers' attention to the design and pace of lessons, together with firm and consistent discipline, ensures that sufficient progress is made by the whole class.

255. Teaching is good (and occasionally very good) overall throughout the school. Teachers have good subject knowledge and expertise. They frequently use their own personal musical skills to

demonstrate how a piece should be played or to teach pupils about instruments. In one lesson, for example, the teacher played the trumpet expertly for the pupils and showed how notes are produced on other brass instruments. In the sixth form, teachers have very good aural skills which they use to good effect to help pupils to analyse challenging chord progressions in the listening tests.

256. Across all year groups good attention is paid to the teaching of literacy and especially to the use and understanding of the technical language of music, to note-taking and to clarity and good presentation in pupils' essays on the history of music. Lesson preparation is thorough. Overall, teachers' expectations are appropriate. Pupils - and especially those with significant behavioural difficulties - are managed well. A team of visiting instrumental teachers makes a very good contribution to pupils' musical education.

257. The day-to-day assessment of pupils' work is good. In Years 7-9 schemes of work, coupled with criteria for assessment, are displayed on classroom walls. Pupils are generally clear about what they need to do in order to achieve high grades. Homework is set very regularly, often to reinforce what has been taught in lessons.

258. The department is well led and managed. The recent relocation of the music department to new accommodation has revitalised the subject. Around 150 pupils receive individual instrumental lessons and a similar number take part in a very good range of extracurricular activities. Included in these activities are African drumming and a swing band that plays to a very high standard. A number of groups perform at such outside events as a senior citizens' dinner and pupils perform regularly in school assemblies. Music makes a very good contribution to the social and cultural life of the school.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

259. By the time pupils reach the end of Year 9 their attainment is average overall. It is sometimes above average, particularly in games. Pupils show good ball-handling techniques in rugby and basketball. In lessons that incorporate appropriate game-related practice and small-sided games they make good progress in acquiring new skills, as when tackling in rugby and using various passing techniques in basketball. In other areas of the curriculum attainment and progress are satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs are, without exception, well integrated into lessons: they make good progress and enjoy the subject.

260. In some gymnastics lessons in Years 7-9 there is a premature emphasis on working with partners at the expense of individual work. This lowers pupils' standard of performance. Pupils do not exhibit basic gymnastics skills nor do they have the confidence to take body weight on their arms or to perform movements such as rolling. Only a small minority understand the fundamental importance of style and tension in gymnastic performance. Both the range and quality of pupils' work are substantially improved when pupils are required to plan and evaluate their work. No apparatus work was seen in gymnastics, largely because lessons, at 35 minutes' maximum duration, are far too short and restrict the standards that can be achieved.

261. By the end of Year 11 pupils' attainment is average overall. Standards of written work vary widely, but the best is well presented and contains accurate spelling and punctuation. Some writing, as for example that about the musculature of the body, indicates that teachers have high expectations of pupils that are well reflected in pupils' work. Pupils have satisfactory skill in controlling a ball. The GCSE course will be taken for the first time in 2001: it has 46 pupils enrolled and is progressing well.

262. Written work in the sixth form is generally of an above average standard. The best work is very good, using ICT thoughtfully for such purposes as information retrieval, word processing and the recording of personal performances. The best pupils' projects about motor-skill acquisition are of a high standard both in terms of content and presentation. Pupils discuss topics enthusiastically, when given the opportunity, but in the minority of cases where teaching restricts debate, their work is rather stereotyped and unimaginative. In 2000 eight out of the nine pupils who took sports studies at GCE A-level passed; one pupil gained a grade as high as B. All three pupils who took PE Studies at A-level passed, at grade D.

263. Teaching is good overall and rarely unsatisfactory throughout the school: three-fifths of that seen during the inspection was good and a further fifth very good. All teachers have specialist training and good subject knowledge. Lessons are delivered with enthusiasm and encouragement to pupils. The best teaching, characterised by an appropriate variety of teaching styles, encourages pupils' independence and emphasises to pupils the need for both careful planning and the evaluation of their own work and that of others. In these lessons pupils respond readily to the high expectations shown by their teachers. Sometimes there is too much emphasis placed on the copying of notes.

264. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are nearly always good and were very good in half the lessons seen. Pupils collaborate well throughout the school, thereby adding impetus to both their practical and theoretical work. Interest and concentration are sustained throughout lessons and pupils are always appropriately attired. In contrast, non-participation in lessons is still all too common in a significant number of lessons, particularly in Years 7-9.

265. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. It contains a good balance of activities in both key stages and incorporates body management skills in Years 7-9. Time allocated for the subject is generally low in the sixth form, but is satisfactory for those sixth formers taking examination courses. The school's timetable is very unhelpful to the subject: a considerable proportion of lessons are of only 35 minutes' duration (often much shorter in practice because of the need to change clothing). Many lessons are taught in shared teaching spaces: this creates restrictions and difficulties for both pupils and teachers. Problems are further compounded by the poor state of the playing fields, which are often waterlogged.

266. Leadership and management are good. The department functions with a strong corporate spirit and responsibilities are effectively distributed and shared. Departmental meetings, regularly held and minuted, ensure that opportunities exist for all teachers to be involved in decision-making. There are good resources and storage facilities. Equipment, textbooks and videotapes for examination courses are in good supply. The reference section for examination courses is insufficiently accessible to pupils, because it is not based in the school's library, but kept under lock and key within the department. A good range of other books is provided in the library, but ICT is not readily available.

267. The department uses its own computer well to produce teaching materials and for administration. It does not, however, have access to networked ICT or have a designated room for the teaching of examination courses. As a result, teachers often carry materials and equipment over extended distances and incur increased administration. Pupils' assessment profiles do not relate sufficiently to national standards. Whilst effort and attitudes are currently reported, pupils are not given either appropriate targets or an indication of the grades these will attract.

268. Since the last inspection there has been improvement in most of the weaknesses identified then. Lessons now start promptly and curricular time is used effectively. Attainment by the end of Year 9 has improved. Schemes of work are better laid out, particularly for sixth-form courses, but documentation is still not detailed enough. The rate of non-participation in lessons still remains a significant problem, particularly in Years 7-9. For example, one large class had one third of pupils "sitting out", many with unacceptable excuses. This is far too high a proportion.

269. Extracurricular provision is good. Opportunities exist for pupils to be involved in a wide range of activities at lunchtimes, after school and occasionally at weekends. Many pupils avail themselves of these opportunities and some individuals and teams do well in competitions. There are several, regular trips abroad, such as the annual skiing programme in the Alps. Soccer teams have visited Holland and Spain. This year one is scheduled to visit Italy and there have been water sports trips in the past to Spain.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

270. Between the ages of 11 and 14, pupils pursue a course of study based on the Wirral Agreed Syllabus for RE. Between the ages of 14 and 16 they pursue a course of personal and social education (PSE) that notionally incorporates elements of religious education. In practice, however, this programme lacks any distinctively Christian, religious or spiritual content: none of these elements is built into the scheme of work. There was no religious dimension to the PSE lessons observed during the inspection

and the school was unable to provide any examples of pupils' RE work in this key stage for scrutiny. Provision at Key Stage 4 therefore does not meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. The school does not offer any course leading to a GCSE examination in RE. Sixth-form pupils occasionally touch on aspects of religion in GCE AS-level general studies, but the course content does not meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. The teaching of RE effectively ceases at the end of Year 9. The school does not meet its statutory responsibility to make appropriate provision for the Agreed Syllabus to be taught to all pupils in Years 10-13.

271. In work seen during the inspection, pupils aged 14 attained an overall standard below that expected by the Agreed Syllabus for their age. Their knowledge and understanding of the richness and diversity of religion and of the place of Christianity and other principal religions in the country is unsatisfactory. Their understanding of why religious beliefs are important to those who hold them and how they shape their lives is inadequate. They have only a limited grasp of religious language and concepts. Their skills in applying religious insights to their own lives and to those of others are underdeveloped.

272. This unsatisfactory level of attainment at age 14 is not a reflection on the quality of teaching or of pupils' attitudes towards the subject. It is largely because the school allocates inadequate time to the teaching of the subject in Years 7-9. The time allocated is below the national average and well below that required for the Agreed Syllabus to be studied in the depth necessary for appropriate standards to be reached. The lack of provision in Years 10-11 and in the sixth form precludes pupils from reaching appropriate standards of attainment by the ages of 16 and 18.

273. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7-9 is satisfactory overall. There is a small element of unsatisfactory teaching, but good teaching in a third of the lessons. Where teaching is strongest, teachers have a good grasp of their subject, know clearly what they wish their pupils to learn and plan their lessons effectively to achieve their aims. Such clarity of planning enabled Year 8 pupils to make good gains in understanding the complex historical relationship between the Near Eastern monotheistic religions of Judaism, Islam and Christianity. They have high expectations of pupils and challenge them with tasks appropriate to their needs. Well-structured activities and tasks led Year 9 pupils, for example, to an appreciation of the differences and similarities between the modern synagogue and the Tabernacle of Old Testament times.

274. Teachers manage time well and maintain a brisk pace in lessons. They make good use of visual aids. In a lesson in Year 7, for example, maps of the Fertile Crescent and the use of a video clip clarified the understanding of pupils about the origins of Judaism. All teachers manage their pupils' behaviour well and enjoy good relationships with them.

275. Where teaching is just satisfactory, it is over-directive in style and over-reliant on worksheets and handouts. Teachers talk too much and do not give pupils sufficient opportunities to develop lines of reasoning in questioning and discussion. They do not provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to develop the skills associated with independent learning, research and enquiry. These weaknesses also reflect the insecure subject knowledge of some non-specialist teachers. They also arise from the time pressures of the short, 35-minute lessons and the shortage of resources in the subject. Homework is not set in Year 9; in other years opportunities are sometimes missed to extend work that has been completed in class. The quality of marking pupils' work is inconsistent: none of it does enough to help pupils to understand how to raise the level of their attainment.

276. The attitudes and behaviour of pupils are good overall. The majority come to lessons keen to learn, behave well and enjoy good relationships with one another and with their teachers. They sustain concentration well. They are keen to ask and answer questions, where opportunities are provided, and listen with respect to one another's views and opinions - as was well evidenced in a lesson in Year 8 on the Covenant with Abraham. Pupils are insufficiently motivated where over-directive teaching fails to engage their interest.

277. Improvement since the previous inspection has been poor. It was a key issue of the previous report that the school should make appropriate provision for the Agreed Syllabus to be taught in Key

Stage 4 and the sixth form. It has not done so. The previous report also identified a related need to develop schemes of work that met the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. Those in existence for Key Stage 3 are still unsatisfactory. At the time of the previous inspection, the range of learning resources was insufficiently wide to meet the differing needs of all pupils. There is still a shortage of resources (particularly of textbooks), so restricting pupils' standard of attainment and rate of progress.

278. Leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory. The head of department is a committed and experienced specialist teacher. He runs the department satisfactorily on a day-to-day basis and offers support to his team of non-specialist teachers, whose composition changes annually. The subject's basic need is for the governing body and senior management to make fundamental provision - to meet the school's statutory responsibility; to ensure that the Agreed Syllabus is effectively taught to all pupils; to employ staff with sufficient specialist knowledge and training; and to provide learning resources that are appropriate to the needs of all pupils.