

INSPECTION REPORT

ST BENEDICT'S CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL

Hensingham, Whitehaven

LEA area: Cumbria

Unique reference number: 112398

Headteacher: Mr Denis Kinsella

Reporting inspector: Ms Marjorie Glynne-Jones
2918

Dates of inspection: October 16-20, 2000

Inspection number: 190467

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

© Crown copyright 2000

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

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

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Voluntary aided

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Red Lonning
Hensingham
Whitehaven
Cumbria

Postcode: CA28 8UG

Telephone number: 01946 852680

Fax number: 01946 852684

Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr John McCoy

Date of previous inspection: November 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Marjorie Glynne-Jones 2918	Registered inspector	English as an additional language	The characteristics of the school The school's results and achievements The quality of teaching and learning How well the school is led and managed
Derek Ashton 9002	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes and values How well the school cares for its pupils How well the school works in partnership with parents
John Bryson 20629	Team inspector	English	
Roy Meakin 18676	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Jenny Martin 23498	Team inspector	Science	
Maureen Ribbins 20478	Team inspector	Science	
Jeff Pickering 31129	Team inspector	Art and design	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
Geoff Edwards 1759	Team inspector	Design and technology	
Brian Ogden 20825	Team inspector	Geography	Learning opportunities
Jim Waddington 13623	Team inspector	History	
Nigel Stiles 17522	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	

Barry Hodgson 22906	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT)	
Neville Brown 14849	Team inspector	Music	
Ros Phillips 20505	Team inspector	Physical education	
Renee Robinson 10941	Team inspector	Vocational courses	Sixth form
David Griffith 1517	Team inspector	Special educational needs Equal opportunities	

The inspection contractor was:

PkR Educational Consultants Ltd
6 Sherman Road
Bromley
Kent BR1 3JH

Tel: 0208 289 1923/4/5
Fax: 02082891919

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

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

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	12
The school's results and achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?	18
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS?	19
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	24
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?	26
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	26
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	29
SIXTH FORM	31
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	33
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES	38

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Benedict's is a voluntary-aided Catholic school in the Hensingham district of Whitehaven. It is a mixed comprehensive school with 1260 pupils on roll, including 229 in the sixth form, and is bigger than most secondary schools nationally. Pupils from St Benedict's and from St Joseph's Catholic School in Workington join the West Cumbria Sixth Form Centre at St Benedict's. Since the last inspection the school has grown overall by 14 per cent, the sixth form by 60 per cent, and the school has been oversubscribed for the last two years. The proportion of pupils with special needs is similar to other secondary schools; the needs mostly relate to learning and behaviour, and include dyslexia. The proportion of pupils from ethnic minority families, reflecting the picture in the county, is very low. This is true of the proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language, none of whom is at an early stage of learning English. The area from which pupils are drawn is one of high disadvantage. When pupils enter the school their attainment overall is below average. In 1999, of those leaving Year 11 and the sixth form, over 70 per cent continued into further or higher education.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St Benedict's is a very good school. The quality of relationships is outstanding and pupils' achievements are very good. Standards at GCSE are above average, although when pupils enter the school their attainment overall is below average. Teaching is good. The school is very well led and managed and provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils' achievements are very good and their personal development and relationships outstanding.
- The headteacher provides excellent leadership ensuring that the school's Christian values underpin and enrich its day-to-day life.
- There is strong management by the headteacher and senior staff, the governing body and among heads of departments/courses.
- The school plans, achieves and evaluates its improvement and development very well and takes excellent care to achieve best value.
- Very good provision is made for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and for pupils' welfare.
- Parents think very highly of the school.

What could be improved

- Standards in French and business studies at Key Stage 4 are below those expected.
- Curriculum arrangements do not provide equal access to the learning opportunities provided at each stage in art and design, music, ICT and personal and social education.
- The availability of ICT resources for subjects is inadequate.
- There are weaknesses in the accommodation for dance, geography, the sixth form, the library and main hall, and for art and design, where roof repair is also needed.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in 1996. A falling trend in standards in the Year 9 tests was reversed in 2000. At GCSE, standards have improved faster than they have nationally, from below average to above average in 1999. At A-level/Advanced GNVQ, after an initial falling off from above average results, results have improved at a faster rate than nationally and in 1999 were close to the national average.

The improvement in the areas identified in the key issues (KI) has been very good overall, through

- Excellent improvement in teaching (KI 3)
- Very good improvement in the accommodation (KI 4) although new needs have arisen
- Very good improvement in pupils' speaking skills (KI 2a)
- Good improvement in raising pupils' aspirations, particularly those of boys (KI 1)
- Good improvement in the management and use of ICT resources (KI 5)
- Good improvement in the assessment and reporting of ICT (KI 6)
- Satisfactory improvement in pupils' active participation in lessons (KI 2b).

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	all schools			Similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
GCSE examinations	C	C	B	A	well above average A average B average C below average D well below average E
A-levels/AS-levels	E	D	C		

In 1999, the overall results in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests were at the standard expected. Although overall results have risen since the 1996 inspection, the trend in the last three years has been a falling one. In 2000 this falling trend was halted: there was an improvement in each subject's results, and in mathematics and science the improvement was good. Pupils' achievements are very good and well above those in schools with a similar intake.

The 1999 GCSE results were above the national average. This was true for both boys and girls. There has been a steady rise in points scores since 1994; the rise is greater than the national trend. For boys, results have risen at a faster rate than nationally. In 2000, the provisional results are not significantly different from those in 1999. The 1999 results for five or more grades A*-G were above the national average, and close to it for five or more grades A*-C. While these results have risen steadily since 1994, the provisional 2000 results at the higher grades show a slight fall to the national average for 1999.

The 1999 results for students taking two or more A-level examinations were close to the national average. The numbers entering have risen steadily. Over the period 1997-1999, the results have risen steadily, at a faster rate than nationally. In 2000, results notably improved, bringing the average points score for students taking two or more examinations to a level above the national average in 1999. Advanced GNVQ results show good improvement from 1998.

The school's target for GCSE average points scores was met in 2000, but not reached for A*-G and A*-C grades. Main reasons were the attendance pattern of a small number of Year 11 pupils, and the results of some pupils who gained four higher grades, not the five targeted. Some appeals made by the school have been successful.

The work seen at Key Stage 3 was overall at the standard expected. This reflects good progress from entry. In nearly half the subjects standards were above those expected, reflecting some very good progress from entry. At Key Stage 4, the picture is similar: overall, work is at the expected standard, and above it in English, science and history, and well above in design and technology. Work of an exceptionally high standard was seen in music. In French at Key Stage 4, standards are below those

expected. In A-level and GNVQ courses, work is at the expected standard, with strengths in English, mathematics and geography, and particularly in design and technology, music and Advanced business.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good: pupils have very positive attitudes to their work and other aspects of school life; they are eager to learn and to be taught, and approach tasks confidently.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good: pupils are polite, courteous and friendly to each other and to adults; they behave well in lessons; as they move round the congested circulation areas they show good humour and patience; no permanent exclusions, better than the national picture; an average number of fixed-term exclusions.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent: the quality of relationships in the school is outstanding; pupils grow in maturity and self-discipline as they move up the school, carrying out school responsibilities sensibly and thoughtfully.
Attendance	Satisfactory overall, and in all years except Year 11 where a small number of pupils is persistently absent.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	Aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
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.

- There has been excellent improvement since the last inspection.
- Teaching is satisfactory or better in 97 per cent of lessons, good or better in 80 per cent, very good or better in 37 per cent and excellent in 10 per cent; it is unsatisfactory in 3 per cent of lessons.
- In all subjects and courses the overall quality is good at all stages except in physical education in sixth form A-level work where it is satisfactory.
- Teaching is very good in English and good in mathematics and science.
- Literacy and numeracy skills are taught well.
- The needs of pupils across the attainment range are met well although higher attainers are not always stretched by the work in modern languages and physical education.
- Unsatisfactory teaching was seen in four lessons: in English and art and design at Key Stage 3, in French at Key Stage 4, and in business in the sixth form. The main weaknesses were in planning and in teachers' subject knowledge.
- The strengths are in English and history at all stages; art and design and design and technology at Key Stages 3 and 4, music at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, physical education at Key Stage 3, and mathematics in the sixth form.
- Pupils' learning is good at each stage because it is well supported by good teaching and by the pupils' very positive attitudes. Pupils are very willing to put effort into their work.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good: sound range of opportunities at Key Stages 3 and 4 and a very good range in the sixth form; good provision for literacy development and sound for numeracy development; very good relationships with partner institutions. The arrangements for art, music and personal and social education at Key Stage 3 and for ICT at Key Stage 4 limit pupils' access to the subjects.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good overall: teachers receive full information on all pupils with special needs; well-qualified support staff are available to provide medical care and specialist support in lessons; pupils' learning targets are fully in place but not always considered in a subject specific way; school staff sometimes not deployed where needed.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Effective arrangements: the small number of pupils is fully integrated into lesson activities and benefit from the good teaching as other pupils do.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Very good: opportunities for these areas of development are rich and varied; they are planned with imagination and underpinned by the clear Christian ethos in the school.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good: the reassuring support systems enable pupils to thrive; there are good procedures for monitoring pupils' progress; very good systems are in place for ensuring pupils' welfare at all times.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	Very good: parents think very highly of the school; they are kept very well informed about school events and developments and consulted about them; pupils' annual reports give parents very good information about their child's progress.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent leadership by the headteacher; the school's Christian values underpin and enrich its day-to-day life, and show particularly in the excellent relationships; management by the headteacher and senior staff, and among departments/courses, is strong, and characterised by warmth and very firm resolve.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good: the governing body is strongly led; it carries out its responsibilities with commendable thoroughness and commitment and much good will; documentation is exemplary; arrangements for collective worship meet requirements but these are not always carried out.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good: improvement and development are successfully achieved because they are well planned and thoroughly evaluated; there is rigorous monitoring of teaching and subject management.

The strategic use of resources	Good: some areas for improvement prevent a judgement of very good; these are the deployment of curriculum time, the maximising of the expertise of learning support staff, the deployment of and access to computers across the school.
Adequacy of staffing, accommodation and learning resources	Very good staffing, good learning resources, satisfactory accommodation overall with improvements needed.
Best value	Excellent care is generally taken to achieve best value.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers have high expectations • They feel comfortable about raising problems and questions with the school • Children make good progress • Their children like school • The school helps children to mature and become responsible people • The school is well managed and led • Teaching is good 	

Parents think very highly of the school. Questionnaire responses were all very positive. The most positive comments are included in the table. Inspectors agree with the positive views of the 79 parents who attended the pre-inspection meeting and the 216 who completed questionnaire returns. The slightly less positive responses to the questionnaire were about activities outside lessons, although 13 per cent of parents recorded a 'don't know', many because their child was in Year 7. This also applied to the questions about the school keeping parents well-informed about their child's progress, and about the school working closely with parents, where 8 per cent of parents recorded a 'don't know'. Inspectors find that the range of activities outside lessons is good, and that parents are very well-informed about their child's progress. They judge the school's links with parents to be very good.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

Key Stage 3

1. In 1999, the overall results in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests were at the standard expected. There were differences between the individual subjects. English results were at the expected standard, mathematics results were above it and science results were below it. Although overall results have risen since the 1996 inspection, in the last three years the trend has been a falling one. Results in English and science have shown a fall while in mathematics they have remained much the same. In 2000, the falling trend was halted: there was an improvement in each subject's results, and in mathematics and science the improvement was good.
2. The school's trend in the results of boys and girls is similar although the national trend is different in these three subjects. Over the three years 1997-99, boys' results in English have shown a falling trend, while nationally the trend was rising. Their mathematics results have remained much the same as they have nationally. The falling trend in boys' science results is greater than the falling trend in science nationally. Over the same period, girls' English results showed a fall while nationally they remained much the same, although fluctuating. Their mathematics results remained fairly constant as did the national results. In science, over the same period, girls' results fell more than they did nationally.
3. On entry to Year 7, pupils' attainment is below average overall, with the majority of pupils of average or below average attainment. Pupils achieve well so that they improve their overall standard more than would be expected. By Year 9, overall, the work seen is at the expected standard, including mathematics and science, but is notably above the expected standard in almost half the subjects, including English. As well as English, these are design and technology, geography, history and music. When compared with schools whose pupils come from similar backgrounds, the achievements of pupils at this school are well above what would be expected overall. The comparisons are different for the individual subjects: well above in English, exceptionally well in mathematics, and above in science.

Key Stage 4

4. The 1999 GCSE results were above the national average. This was true for both boys and girls. There has been a steady rise in points scores since 1994; the rise is greater than the national rise. This is because for boys, results have risen at a faster rate than nationally over the last three years, while the trend for all pupils and for girls reflects the national trend. In 2000, the provisional results are not significantly different from those in 1999; a slight fall puts them still above the national average for 1999.

5. There has been a steady rise since 1995 in the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A*-G which levelled out in 1999. The 1999 results were above the national average for both boys and girls, and the three-year trend 1997-1999 showed the school's results rising faster than the results nationally because of the improvement in boys' results. The 2000 results show a slight fall to the national average for 1999.
6. Since 1994, there has been a steady rise in the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A*-C. In 1999, results were close to the national average. The three-year trend is close to the national trend for boys' and girls' results together, while there is significant improvement in boys' results. In 2000, the provisional results show a slight fall. Given the size of the Year 11 group in 1999, the difference would have to be about six per cent to reflect a significant difference. During the inspection, the school received confirmation of some successful appeals raising D grades to Cs. The outcome of further appeals is not known at the time of writing.
7. Subject strengths in 1999 show in the results for English, design and technology and history. In these, pupils did better than they did overall in their other subjects, comparing favourably with the national picture. Pupils did much the same as they did overall in their other subjects, also comparing favourably with the national picture, in English literature, mathematics, double science, geography and German. Subject weaknesses show in the results for single science, business studies, French, religious studies and general studies, where pupils did less well than they did in their other subjects, comparing unfavourably with the national picture. In art and design, pupils did better than in their other subjects overall, which is a similar picture to the national one. In physical education, pupils did much the same as they did overall in their other subjects, also a similar picture to the national one.
8. There are differences in the comparative strengths in boys' and girls' results. Boys' results compare favourably with the national picture in English, where they did better than they did overall in their other subjects; and in English literature, mathematics, double science, design and technology, geography and history, where they did much the same. The favourable comparisons for girls are in English, art and design, design and technology and history, where they did better than in other subjects, and in double science where they did much the same. The unfavourable comparisons for boys are in French, religious studies and general studies, and for girls in mathematics, French and general studies.
9. In the work seen, standards reached those expected in all subjects except French where standards were below average. In some subjects the standards seen were above average; this was true in English, science and history; they were well above those expected in design and technology. Standards improve from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 in science, design and technology and music; they are maintained in other subjects except geography, where they fall to an average standard, and in French where they fall to below average. When compared with schools whose pupils come from similar backgrounds, the achievements of pupils at this school are well above what would be expected overall.

Sixth form

10. The 1999 results for students taking two or more A-level examinations were close to

the national average. They rose from being well below the national average in 1997 to below average in 1998; there was a further rise in 1999. The numbers entering have risen steadily. Over the period 1997-1999, the results have risen steadily, at a faster rate than nationally. Girls' results are better than boys' results although nationally they differ little. In 2000, A-level results notably improved, bringing the average points score for students taking two or more examinations to a level above the national average for 1999. The performance of the Year 13 group in 1999 was slightly lower than would be expected by their GCSE results in 1997. In 2000, the results were above those that would be expected by the GCSE results in 1998.

11. Advanced GNVQ results show good improvement from 1998. Overall, in 1999 results were above the national average. Advanced business results were very good. The pass rate for intermediate courses was significantly higher than the national pass rate. Students did particularly well in key skills with all Year 12 entries gaining Levels 1, 2 and 3. In 2000, the quality of GNVQ results was maintained.
12. In the A-level work seen, standards reached those expected in all subjects. Work was above the expected standard in English, mathematics, science and history, well above in design and technology and excellent in music. Students' progress is at least satisfactory in all subjects, good in English and mathematics, and very good in design and technology and music. The work seen on GNVQ courses was always at least at a pass standard. On Advanced business, higher attainers' work was above the expected standard. Pupils' achievements in the sixth form are very good.

Whole school

13. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress overall, particularly those pupils who receive individual support from a learning support assistant. At Key Stages 3 and 4, and in the sixth form, pupils with special needs make at least satisfactory progress in all subjects and their progress is good overall in mathematics and modern languages. At Key Stage 3, their progress is good in science, history and physical education, and at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form it is very good in design and technology. At all stages, pupils have individual plans for their learning that meet requirements and are well matched to pupils' needs. These plans give learning targets and prompts about behaviour which provide effective guidance for support staff and subject teachers. Because the targets relate to communication skills and numeracy, which apply to all subjects, pupils' learning is supported well.
14. Gifted and talented pupils make good progress. Every encouragement is given to pupils to use their talents to the full, for example in sports and music, and in their personal subject strengths. This is reflected in 1999 by the 13 per cent of pupils gaining GCSE grades A* and A, the five per cent gaining A grades at A-level and the sixty per cent gaining distinction in Advanced GNVQ business.
15. Pupils for whom English is an additional language make good progress. They benefit, as do other pupils, from the quality of teaching and the quality of relationships in the school, so that they learn well.

16. In 2000, the school met its GCSE target for pupils' average points scores. The target for five or more grades A*-G was not met; a significant factor was the poor attendance of a small group of pupils. The target for five or more grades A*-C was also not met, although the outcome of appeals is still awaited at the time of writing.

Subjects

17. In English, pupils at Key Stage 3 speak clearly and contribute enthusiastically to class discussion. Their responses to the texts are good. They write in a range of styles. Their handwriting is satisfactory. They spell monosyllabic and common polysyllabic words accurately. At Key Stage 4, pupils work independently. Their speaking and listening skills are good. They read aloud with confidence, fluency and expression. Pupils understand significant ideas and events. They write for a range of purposes and produce a range of extended writing. Pupils improve the fluency and accuracy of their writing with re-drafting. Handwriting is good. Pupils spell and punctuate accurately. In the sixth form, pupils produce a very good range of original work. They show a thorough knowledge of the theory of language and contribute to technical discussions. Their analysis of style is comprehensive and discerning. Pupils show good understanding of the social context and themes of classic novels and Shakespeare's plays.
18. In mathematics, pupils at Key Stage 3 can manipulate algebraic symbols and interpret and illustrate statistical data. They have knowledge of the names and properties of common geometrical shapes. At Key Stage 4, pupils have a comprehensive repertoire of mathematical vocabulary that they use confidently to explain their work. In the sixth form, students work confidently with the pure and applied elements of the course.
19. In science, at Key Stage 3, pupils have a good grasp of a wide range of scientific processes such as the evaporation of water and expansion of solids. They plan and carry out simple experiments, for example to identify starch and sugar in food tests, and gain valid results. At Key Stage 4, pupils confidently discuss complex processes in biology, physics and chemistry. They explain life processes, such as transpiration in plants, and understand abstract ideas such as the relationship between the bonding of atoms in molecules and the effect that it has on the property of the compound formed. Their investigative skills are good. In the sixth form, students are confident in their discussion of complex ideas in each of the science subjects. Students can calculate the equilibrium constant for a reversible reaction and plan an experiment to find the effect of a catalyst on the reaction. They have appropriate strategies to carry out the work.
20. In art and design, pupils at Key Stage 3 have good skills of drawing, colour and composition. They are beginning to use technical vocabulary with some confidence. They have some knowledge of famous artists and designers. At Key Stage 4, pupils make good use of observational drawing when producing a variety of painting, packaging, poster and publicity work. In the sixth form, students develop their observation and analytical skills further in individual research work, but do not always recognise that observational drawing is a strong means of gathering information. At all stages, three-dimensional work is undeveloped.

21. In design and technology, pupils at Key Stage 3 manage individual projects well using a variety of materials. They develop graphic skills through designing and making activities. They use equipment responsibly. At Key Stage 4, pupils use correct methods of investigation, research and modelling. Their knowledge of nutrition and their ability to adapt recipes are good. They have a good understanding of batch production and industrial practices and use sketching techniques well to develop ideas. In the sixth form, students produce a very good variety of original designs. Their graphic skills are well developed, and they have a clear understanding of material properties and processes. In food technology, high level investigation skills are developed when, for example, researching fermentation.
22. In geography, at Key Stage 3, pupils have a good grasp of spatial and environmental issues and knowledge of levels of world development. They use technical vocabulary exceptionally well. They present maps, diagrams and illustrations well on a range of topics and their ability to take notes from a variety of sources - visual, map, diagram and written text - is usually well developed. At Key 4, pupils show an understanding of migration, push and pull factors and the symbols used in ordnance survey mapping. In the sixth form, students on GNVQ courses understand the conflicting pressures on the environment in tourist areas, competition for land use, the inequality between regions and the consequences of these for employment opportunities.
23. In history, pupils at Key Stage 3 have a competent grasp of chronology and can sequence key religious changes which occurred in the sixteenth century. They can compare and contrast events in different historical periods. In analysis and group discussion, pupils deal confidently with increasingly abstract concepts such as those associated with the cultural symbolism of American Indians. At Key Stage 4, pupils discover underlying meanings in source material. They are aware of the potential of different types of evidence including oral history, for example in work on life in Britain during World War II. They are less confident in dealing with differing interpretations of historical events, for example about life in Victorian towns. In the sixth form, students show sound skills in documentary analysis and are aware of author bias. They can sense the audience for which particular letters and reports were written, for example in work on fifteenth century diplomatic history.
24. In ICT at Key Stage 3, pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of computer systems and can use a variety of software packages. Building on the use of word processing in Year 7, pupils develop skills in using spreadsheets and databases in Years 8 and 9. At Key Stage 4, pupils increase their knowledge of the application of computers and use their learned skills in their projects of database and communications as part of the GCSE short course. In the sixth form, students are able to use word processing and desktop publication in the presentation of their work, particularly in GNVQ assignments.
25. In modern languages, pupils at Key Stage 3 develop their skills, particularly in listening, speaking and reading. They listen attentively to recorded and live material from which they identify significant details. They give short oral and written responses to what they have heard or read. At Key Stage 4, pupils increase their skills over a wider range of topics. Some write responses to what they have heard or read, but most find this difficult. Pupils can describe themselves and their work, their town and their local environment and explain present and past events. In the sixth form, students' knowledge and linguistic skills reflect their interests and development.
26. In music, pupils at Key Stage 3 perform and compose well using instruments, including electronic keyboards. At Key Stage 4, they have a good understanding of music elements and forms. They perform and compose with confidence and

imagination. Students in the sixth form are good musicians. They have a wide knowledge of musical styles, and of their commercial application in composing for films.

27. In physical education, pupils at Key Stage 3 have effective ball control skills and use these skilfully in competitive games. Girls can work with a partner in gymnastics to compose sequences based on matching movements in a variety of ways. All pupils can explain the effects of exercise on the body and know the importance of warming up and cooling down. At Key Stage 4, in general lessons and in the GCSE course, pupils are confident in taking a variety of roles within a lesson, such as referee or warm-up leader and most are developing tactical awareness in games. In gymnastics, girls compose partner sequences involving advanced support skills. In the sixth form, A-level students apply skill acquisition principles and group theory to the learning of a sport skill and analyse each other's performance in some depth.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

28. Pupils have very positive attitudes to their work: they are eager to learn and to be taught, and approach tasks confidently. This reflects the good teaching and excellent relationships throughout the school. Pupils respond to their teachers' positive, caring attitudes and demand for courtesy and respect for others. Pupils take a pride in their appearance and in the presentation of their work. The school uniform worn by all pupils and liked by parents creates a positive identity; the pupils contributed to the recent decisions about uniform changes. Pupils are involved in a wide range of activities and make the most of the opportunities provided. They work productively together in different groupings and when working independently on their own.
29. Behaviour is good. Pupils are polite, courteous and friendly to each other and to adults; they show patience, tolerance and maturity in many situations, for example, as they move round the school. No aggressive behaviour towards other pupils was observed. Pupils take care of school property. The number of fixed-term exclusions is about average, while there have been no permanent exclusions for more than a year.
30. Pupils with special needs show a willingness to learn; they respond and behave well in lessons. For many, their targets for improvement relate to aspects of personal development, including behaviour; with effective support from staff they increase their self-confidence and ability to organise their own work independently. They mix well with other pupils and are fully integrated into the day-to-day life of the school.
31. The quality of relationships in the school is outstanding. Pupils grow in maturity as they move up the school, carrying out school responsibilities sensibly and thoughtfully. For example, they take prefect duties seriously, fulfilling them willingly and with enthusiasm. Members of the school council play a part in school decision-making; for example, they were fully consulted about the lunch menu and their suggestions are acted on. They have contributed to decisions about uniform, lockers and benches outside. They represent the school on occasions such as the opening of the sixth form centre. Pupils respond well to the system of awards and certificates for academic, sporting and social achievements.
32. Attendance and punctuality are satisfactory. Unauthorised absence is very low. The poor attendance of a small number of pupils in Year 11 has a detrimental effect on the attainment and progress of these pupils as well as on the school's attendance figures.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

33. Teaching has improved very significantly since the last inspection. Then, the quality was satisfactory or better in 89 per cent of lessons; this figure is now 97 per cent. Then there was good teaching, or better, in nearly half of the lessons seen, and very good or better teaching in 10 per cent. The figures now are 80 per cent and 37 per cent, with 10 per cent of lessons having excellent teaching. The 11 per cent of lessons with unsatisfactory teaching reported then have been reduced to 3 per cent.
34. At each stage, subject teaching overall is at least good, as is GNVQ teaching in the sixth form. The exception is the physical education teaching at A-level, now in its second year, which is satisfactory. The school strengths are English and history at all stages; in art and design and music at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form; and in physical education at Key Stage 3, design and technology at Key Stage 4 and mathematics in the sixth form. This overall quality, combined with pupils' very positive attitudes to their work, results in pupils learning well.
35. Literacy and numeracy are taught well. All subjects and courses contribute to pupils' literacy standards. The draft literacy policy has a high profile in the school, emphasising that, in all subjects, pupils should be taught to use correct and appropriate expression and to read accurately and with understanding. There is a focus on ensuring that pupils know and understand key vocabulary in subjects. For example, vocabulary lists and technical words are displayed in geography teaching rooms. A similar approach is being taken to the development of numeracy skills, although the co-ordination across the school is not so far ahead as it is for literacy. In the sixth form, key skills are taught very well. The very good quality developed on vocational courses has supported the Curriculum 2000 developments very well. For example, in Advanced health and social care, role-play to reassure a mother whose child was going away overnight for the first time was used very effectively to promote language skills.
36. The needs of pupils across the attainment range are generally met well, although higher attainers are not always stretched by the work in modern languages and physical education. For example, in French and German, extension work is not provided for higher attainers. In physical education, although tasks at different levels were provided for a Year 10 general physical education lesson, the more difficult tasks were not sufficiently challenging. Because the level of challenge is excellent in English, pupils' learning is very good. There is very good challenge in history at all stages, in art and design and design and technology at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, and in mathematics and geography in the sixth form. The contribution from the learning support assistants in lessons noticeably improves the opportunity for all pupils with special needs to participate equally.
37. The school's ethos is focused on all members of the community working together. This shows in the policy of providing specialist support for pupils with special needs in subject lessons, so keeping to a minimum their withdrawal for small group teaching. As a result, the skills of the supporting teachers are more widely available to the benefit of all the pupils in a class. When pupils are taught in withdrawal groups, good teaching and excellent attitudes result in very good learning. The information gained from tests and assessments is used very effectively to match lesson tasks to pupils' needs as well as to plan future work. This information is shared with pupils who are able to describe how their own work has improved.
38. A particularly good feature of the improvements which have been achieved is that the quality of teaching skills is almost always good across all subjects. There are two

aspects judged to be entirely satisfactory across subjects, but not yet good. One is the quality of teachers' day-to-day assessment and evaluation of pupils' work, through their comments in lessons and the marking of work. Marking, as it should be, is generally detailed and supportive leading to improvements in attainment. It is done very well in ICT at Key Stages 3 and 4, in design and technology and music at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, and in science and Advanced business in the sixth form. The other aspect is the way homework is planned as an essential part of pupils' learning, although this is very good in English and music, and in design and technology in the sixth form. For these two features to provide good quality it would be necessary, for example, for there to be no incidence of marking lacking detail or of homework tasks being undemanding, as was observed on occasion in science and geography.

39. Two strong features are teachers' subject knowledge and skills and their skills in managing pupils. Both are at least very good in all subjects, while in English teachers' subject knowledge is excellent and used extremely well to raise standards. This is true in history at Key Stage 3, and in music at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. In history, teachers use their expertise very skilfully and with enthusiasm to deepen pupils' understanding and independence of thinking. In music, the teacher's breadth and depth of knowledge of contemporary music and skills in demonstrating at the keyboard resulted in excellent learning by Year 12 students taking A-level in the subject.
40. Unsatisfactory teaching was seen in English and art and design at Key Stage 3, in French at Key Stage 4, and in business in the sixth form. There were common weaknesses: in planning work at an appropriate level so that all the pupils in the class were challenged to achieve well and motivated to learn; in continuing activities for too long so that the lesson moved at too slow a pace to sustain pupils' interest and concentration; and in unclear explanations of the lesson content and tasks which showed some inadequacies in subject knowledge. These weaknesses resulted in unsatisfactory learning and, on occasion, poor learning, so that pupils' work did not reach the expected standard in the lesson. It is to the school's credit that in these lessons pupils' behaviour was not affected, except in French where pupils' attitudes were poor. In the English lesson, pupils behaved excellently.

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

41. The foundations for the curriculum are the Catholic ethos of the school and the school's aims and values. The curriculum is good. The school provides the National Curriculum and religious education at Key Stages 3 and 4, with some additional opportunities at Key Stage 4 that helpfully broaden the range, but do not yet include accredited vocational courses. In the sixth form, a wide range of advanced academic and vocational courses is provided under the revised arrangements for Curriculum 2000, with religious education, general studies, key skills and additional opportunities in an enrichment programme.
42. While overall the range and quality of the school's curriculum are good, some aspects of the current organisation do not meet the school's aim of ensuring equal access for all pupils to what is provided. For example, although overall the time allocations for music at Key Stage 3 are similar to those in other schools nationally, the distribution of time results in a reduction in Year 9. This is particularly unhelpful in music when pupils' experience of Year 9 music has a strong bearing on their choices at Key Stage 4. While this also applies in some measure to art and design, the smaller teaching groups enable pupils to receive more support and guidance on an individual basis.

Three-dimensional work in art and design is not sufficiently incorporated into schemes of work. Those pupils in Years 8 and 9 who choose to do a second modern language do not have a lesson in personal and social education, although those taking one language do. No alternative arrangement is made for them. A review of the arrangements for personal and social education is appropriately scheduled for July 2001.

43. At Key Stage 4, the broad range of subjects extends all National Curriculum subjects and religious education, with additions such as business studies. Three-dimensional work remains undeveloped in art and design. All pupils take a short GCSE course in ICT. However, the full ICT course is not included in the timetabled curriculum although offered in after school sessions and at lunchtime. This arrangement is unsatisfactory, and does not meet the school's aim of providing equal access to the curriculum. In other respects the school successfully offers pupils an open choice of courses at Key Stage 4. The current arrangement for music, provided in after school sessions, results from pupils' choice; although the subject was offered twice in the options lines there were no takers. Pupils preferred to have the opportunity to take music as an extra in their own time. The school respects this, while regretting it.
44. In the sixth form, a wide range of A-level and advanced GNVQ courses is provided to which there is open access. The school has made it possible to build a programme of new AS courses with GNVQ/VCE so extending the range of curriculum opportunities for students. The range reflects the school's strengths, staff talents and demand. All Year 12 students are offered an accredited key skills course. The school has a policy of entering all students for general studies in Year 13, which will be planned to build on the key skills achievements of the previous year. At the start of the academic year, the distribution of subjects across the option columns prevented some combinations from being taken. Inspectors' discussion with students and correspondence from parents indicate that the issues are now resolved following consultation and discussion.
45. Opportunities for literacy development are generally good across the school, with attention to reading, wall display, and use of technical terms, notably in science, geography and history. The pupil planner has a function in this through the recording of key words and targets. Planning is underway to meet forthcoming requirements to extend the primary literacy and numeracy strategies into Key Stage 3. A co-ordinated approach to developing numeracy skills across the curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 is lacking. Not all subject departments provide opportunities for pupils to use their numeracy skills although good opportunities are provided in some, for example, in design and technology. Implementing the new numeracy policy is a development plan target. By contrast, the sixth form key skills programme promotes numeracy skills well across the range of courses.

46. The programme of personal, social and health education begins in Year 8 and is provided as part of the religious education curriculum. There is a strong and helpful emphasis on careers education. Sex education and drugs awareness are taught as required through designated curriculum subjects, in particular English and science. Visiting theatre groups stage performances to raise awareness of drugs and alcohol abuse. The programme is currently under review in preparation for the introduction of citizenship.
47. All pupils with special educational needs have full access to the curriculum at all stages and benefit from supportive relationships with staff and other pupils. On entry, the learning needs of Year 7 pupils are effectively assessed and used to determine the arrangements for support. The liaison with primary schools which begins at an early stage in Year 6 is having a very positive effect on planning for smooth transfer from Year 6 to Year 7. Subject teachers have a good awareness of the pupils with special needs in their classes and of their general learning targets. However, there are no subject versions of pupils' individual targets to ensure that the work planned for them is at an appropriate level of challenge in the subject as well as in literacy and numeracy. The deployment of specialist teachers to give learning support in some lessons, for example in English, contributes effectively in promoting good standards.
48. The school's organisation of teaching groups by attainment has positive effects on all pupils' progress. The arrangement for pupils with special needs to work in middle sets for some subjects, as well as in the mixed ability groups in others, provides good opportunities for them to work alongside pupils with different interests and aptitudes. All benefit. A group of lower attainers in Key Stage 4 takes single science and attends West Cumbria College each week for a combined course in subjects such as construction crafts, catering or health and beauty. The suitability of this fairly new arrangement is rightly under review in relation to the standards pupils achieve in single science, which are not as good as the standards they achieve in their other subjects, and in terms of the variety of demands it makes on pupils.
49. The school has strong links with its partner schools, including local primary and secondary schools, and with colleges of further and higher education. Partnership work is strong within the family of Roman Catholic schools in the diocese. For example, the implications for Key Stage 3 of the primary literacy and numeracy strategies have been explored, together with issues in science for the transition from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. Good arrangements are made for students to visit universities for taster days and introductory courses. For example, Year 9 pupils visit Lancaster University for a *Taster Day* when they are shown round by students and staff. Students in Years 12 and 13 have a three-day residential visit to universities, both regional institutions and those further afield.
50. Pupils' learning benefits well from the contribution of the community. Staff work hard to increase pupils' awareness of the local adult community and seek out links with institutions both near and far in order to involve pupils in stimulating activities requiring a range of practical skills. There are good business links, both locally and in the wider area, which make a positive contribution to pupils' understanding and attainment, at all levels and ages. There is an imaginative approach to careers education. For example, new pupils' interest in the world of work is encouraged by a mentoring evening with parents in their first term in Year 7 which focuses on setting personal goals. This is followed by a summer term careers evening for Year 7 focused on raising awareness of the world of work and pupils' aspirations. The school's participation in a range of projects is valuable and effective in building pupils' self-esteem and motivation. The range includes the *Go For It* course supported by British

Nuclear Fuels (BNFL), the *Break Through* project in the sixth form, the course in counselling skills for buddies, and the *Harbour Project* for low achievers in Whitehaven. BNFL provides expertise for careers activities and engineering education; for example, two engineers support the Year 8 and 9 *Young Engineers'* club each week. Regular visitors to the school include workshop leaders for the arts and writing and others who introduce pupils to work activities in the wider world. For example, in history at Key Stage 3, pupils learn about the mining community from a former miner. There are links with public services and high street traders, for example, a major retail store and fast-food chain. Year 10 pupils benefit from well-organised work experience.

51. Opportunities for extra-curricular activities are very good. Many pupils participate despite the difficulties of transport after school. The good range of clubs in many departments, both at lunchtime and after school, is a result of staff goodwill and commitment. There are excellent opportunities to develop particular interests in angling, music, chess, computers, drama, science and mathematics. Pupil representatives from the successful *Young Engineers* club are entered for prestigious challenges and perform well against national competitors. Taking part in this and in the *Young Enterprise Scheme* requires their long-term commitment. There are language links with European schools from which exchanges have followed, well-developed links with a school in Tanzania, and others with Sweden and most recently with Jordan. Visits are arranged to support the curriculum, both in the region and further afield. For example, art and design students have visited the *Tate Modern*. The physical education department participates in major and minor individual and team sports training and matches, and has fixtures on Saturday mornings as well as other occasions in rugby, football, basketball and netball. School performances are a consistent and well-supported feature in the school calendar, for some of which the school takes over the local *Rosehill* theatre.
52. The school is involved in the *Investment in Excellence* scheme designed to raise self-esteem, motivation and target setting for all pupils. Up to the present, 26 members of staff have undertaken training in this scheme that is considerably underwritten by BNFL. Partner primary schools are involved in the scheme with St Benedict's. The *Go for it* scheme provides a very effective follow-up for Year 11 pupils.
53. Since the last inspection, good progress overall has been made on the key issue concerned with the use and management of ICT. A substantial investment in equipment for specialist rooms has been recently made. The specialist curriculum for ICT ensures that pupils' attainment meets the standard expected. As the provision of computers within departments is often poor or non-existent, the ICT rooms can be booked by departments to enable the subject ICT requirements to be met. However, current supply cannot meet demand and the rooms are often oversubscribed.

Pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development

54. The school provides very well for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. This shows improvement since the last inspection when provision was found to be good. The tone is set when visitors approaching the main entrance are confronted by the carved stone angel in the *Garden of Hope*, created in remembrance of the children of Dunblane. The angel and the carved, stone seat placed opposite, are the work of a former pupil and millennium projects; the aim is to encourage reflection. There are a number of such opportunities around school: a further project in hand will consist of hand-prints pressed into wet plaster and be accompanied by appropriate verses. The headteacher and staff have successfully created a Christian school with a particularly caring ethos. An indication of their success is that although attendance at Mass is not compulsory between two and four hundred pupils attend.
55. A new policy for personal development will be introduced in September 2001. The aim is to increase opportunities for pupils to take responsibility, develop initiative as learners and further appreciate different cultures and beliefs. Training for this policy in planned using *Investment in Excellence* processes to draw on the special talents of teachers to cultivate caring responsibility within their pupils. Spiritually moving and inspirational assemblies and extra-curricular activities make significant contributions to the pupils' development although there are occasions when the daily concerns of administration are allowed to prevent quiet thought and reflection.
56. A school imperative is to nurture pupils' spiritual development. For example, there is a planned mission for spiritual renewal with the aim of appealing to Catholic and non-Catholic pupils and parents. The school hopes that events such as liturgy and gospel groups will have positive effects in the surrounding parishes. The mission will address matters of personal belief and response. Teachers take opportunities to raise the spiritual awareness of their pupils in English, science, the creative arts, science, geography, history and in sixth form courses, but elsewhere these opportunities are sometimes missed. Young people at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are able to take part in retreats to gain deeper understanding and self-awareness. This opportunity is being introduced in the current year for pupils in Year 7.
57. The measures taken to develop pupils' moral values are very good. A clear Christian moral code underpins the school's day-to-day life; teachers are good role models. In English, pupils of all ages are able to consider characters in literature and draw conclusions about moral choices and appropriate behaviour. Through reading and discussion they have frequent opportunities to consider important human problems and make choices. In gymnastics, there is development of trust when pupils support each other in balance exercises and consider the relationship between trust and care. In geography, pupils consider the complex problems of less economically developed countries, the one child policy in China, the implications of ethnic minority concentrations in British cities and the debate surrounding genetically modified crops. Throughout the curriculum there is an emphasis on positive, supporting attitudes and respect for the views and feelings of others.

58. Pupils' social development is fostered very well indeed. A strong feature of the school is that pupils are made aware of the choices available and the decisions to be made. Displays show pupils' involvement in clubs, the school council and the many trips out of school. Lessons and activities aimed at developing co-operation and tolerance are strong in English, art and design, history, modern languages, music and physical education. Pupils are encouraged to contribute to the life of the school community, for example, in Year 8 they take a pride in using long-handled litter-pickers to maintain the clean appearance of the school grounds. Human relationships, marriage and human reproduction are considered in personal, social and health education and in science. Environmental issues are investigated through geography field trips, for example, footpath erosion, the management of people and traffic, access to woodland and lakeshores and the impact of tourism: all issues currently facing the Lake District. A number of pupils attend the *Agenda 21 Forum* at Cleator Moor, for example, to recommend action points for the town council to improve the local environment. Students attended an international *Medline* taster week on medicine in America. Year 8 classes consider a range of environmental issues including endangered species in plants and animals, population growth and migration. A strength of the school is the way pupils raise funds on a regular basis to support charities. Pupil representatives on the school council have taken part in consultation over school lunch menus and uniform, and contribute to other decisions. The quality of discussion of social issues in the school shows considerable maturity while the pupils' attitudes to adults are impressive.
59. Good arrangements are made to support pupils' cultural development. There are opportunities to take part in a range of theatre trips and visits to musical and sporting events. An artist-in-residence programme has high priority, the school finding money to ensure its continuation. A recent workshop brought a flavour of African art and music to pupils that resulted in sculptures as well as strong drama and music activities. Other residencies produced the fine ceramic mosaic in the entrance hall. Displays around school are impressive and lively. The art and design department recently took 25 pupils to the *Victoria and Albert Museum*. In English, pupils are encouraged to read a range of English and foreign literature; they recently benefited from the visit of a Cumbrian dialect poet. In dance, pupils' work on Asian dance styles promotes discussion of cultural factors. There are trips to France, Malta and Germany for sports teams which allow pupils to experience different cultures. The modern languages department arranges visits to Cologne and Paris. Significant moves are being made to increase awareness of different cultures through school exchanges and visits, for example, through a Tanzanian exchange in alternating years, funded by the school's own efforts and by sponsorship. There is an exchange visit with Borlänge in Sweden, and plans to develop links with Jordan. However, not all subjects plan the curriculum to include such opportunities.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

60. The school provides very good care and support for pupils. A disciplined yet friendly atmosphere enables a sensitive and reassuring support system to thrive. Teachers know their individual pupils well and inculcate a strong sense of belonging, with the result that pupils feel able to talk openly about interests and problems to staff and other adults. The quality of teaching is enhanced by the quality of support. Professional counselling is available to pupils if they wish, for example, if they have suffered bereavement, bullying or have experienced personal difficulties. The counsellor's time, two days a week, is fully used.
61. Procedures for monitoring pupils' progress and personal development are good. Computer based records are maintained containing a wide range of assessment and

other data. Heads of department and heads of year have access to this data to assist in their monitoring and guidance of pupils. The pupils' planners, by keeping parents informed, contribute to this good provision. A very good mentoring system provides additional information from Year 7 and is very effective in helping pupils and their parents to gain a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' work. The programme involves termly discussions with staff at mentoring evenings which review progress and set individual improvement targets. Pupils understand their targets and generally feel clear about how well they are getting on; for example, pupils in Year 7 are aware of their achievements and what they need to do to improve. Pupils with special educational needs are identified early in Year 7 and appropriate measures are taken to support them. Their progress is reviewed regularly. Annual reviews meet requirements. There are good arrangements for assessment. The school is using the information gained from internal and external assessments to check whether any aspects of curriculum planning need to be modified and whether individual pupils are progressing as they should. This is done well in design and technology. Liaison with primary schools at an early stage in Year 6 is having a very positive impact on planning for continuity in pupils' work and progress.

62. There are systematic and effective systems for monitoring and improving pupils' behaviour and attendance. Year and tutor group records of attendance are displayed. An awards system is in place: a staged series of certificates is presented at a special assembly at the end of each term with awards for academic and personal achievements. There is a prize for the best art exhibition of GCSE and A-level work. The school works closely with the educational welfare workers in seeking to improve attendance, particularly in Year 11. The behaviour policy is clearly understood by staff and pupils and is consistently put into practice. Incidents of bullying are taken seriously and parents are invited to school to ensure that problems are speedily resolved. A stepped series of sanctions is carried out when necessary and parents are kept appropriately informed and involved. These procedures have contributed to the elimination of permanent exclusions and to the limitation of fixed-term exclusions.
63. The school has an appropriate child protection policy, a nominated officer as required; staff have received training in accordance with the local education authority programme. Staff are aware of child abuse procedures. Suitable records are maintained. A comprehensive health and safety policy is in operation and a specialist health and safety officer has been appointed. Very good arrangements are in place, for example relating to fire precautions, medical and first-aid support. Records are well maintained. Safety audits are regularly undertaken and governors give priority and careful regard to the issues brought to their attention. Risk assessment procedures are on the way to being fully implemented across the school. There are appropriate procedures to ensure pupils' safe passage around the school and when departing to their respective buses. There is some congestion on the landings near the stairways although this was not seen to present any problems during the inspection.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

64. Parents' response to the inspection questionnaire and their comments at the pre-inspection meeting showed that they think very highly of the school. Parents have positive views about their children's progress and the quality of teaching. They are pleased with the good standards, pastoral support, the Catholic ethos, discipline and community spirit. Parents appreciate the professionalism and confidentiality of the staff, the behaviour and discipline of the children and the helpfulness of consultation evenings. Mention was made of the lack of lockers and chairs.
65. Links with parents are of a consistently high quality. The home-school agreement emphasises the school's commitment to work with pupils, parents and the wider community to provide the very best education possible. Ensuring the involvement of parents in the school's endeavours has high priority. Parents are widely consulted, as they were for example over the home-school agreement. Pupils' planners provide an effective means of exchanging information between home and school. Communication between the school and parents is excellent. A comprehensive, attractively illustrated prospectus, annual governors' reports, regular news bulletins and the headteacher's letters provide a wealth of information and keep parents well-informed. School documentation is clearly presented and enhances the reader's image of the school.
66. Annual reports on pupils' progress are of a very high standard and provide a complete record of academic achievement, including target setting. The reports contain suggestions about how parents might help their child to improve. Opportunities for further consultation are provided by mentoring and career presentation evenings when parents attend with their child. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are appropriately involved in their child's learning and kept well informed of their progress.
67. An effective *Parent Teachers Association* raises substantial funds to support the work of the school, for example through the purchase of computers and lockers, providing sports kit for a swimming team taking part in a national event, and through funding bursaries for a student visit to America. Pupils' learning, behaviour and personal development benefit from the very good liaison with parents.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

68. The headteacher's leadership is excellent. By example and by expectation he ensures that the school's Christian values underpin and enrich its day-to-day life and provide the firm basis from which all management decisions are made. Staff and governors share a strong determination to create the very best conditions for pupils' academic and personal development. The quality of relationships is outstanding and almost without exception enables all members of the school community to offer their best response. The effect on pupils' learning is very positive. This was seen in lessons during the inspection and is reflected by the good improvement in standards at GCSE and A-level since the last inspection.
69. The warmth which is characteristic of the school's leadership is matched by firm resolve and highly strategic management. The headteacher has high expectations of staff effectiveness. Rigorous procedures are in place for monitoring the quality of subject management and the quality of teaching. Internal monitoring procedures are strengthened by external evaluation to ensure that the school's own expectations are high enough. The success is shown, for example, by the extent of the improvements

in the science department and by the standards of work seen in science during the inspection. The responsibilities of senior staff and heads of department are well formulated, all clearly specifying the monitoring role. Recent revision of the responsibilities of senior staff has ensured that these are clearly focused and enable high quality contributions to be made. The senior team has a very clear understanding of strengths and weaknesses across the school. Leadership and management by heads of subject are nearly always good. In art and design, design and technology, history and ICT they are very good; in English they are excellent. Heads of department play a full role in the school's monitoring procedures and in setting clear targets for improvement. Policy for performance management is in place and there is good awareness of the procedures among staff and governors.

70. The governing body carries out its responsibilities with commendable thoroughness. The chair gives strong leadership, fulfilling the role of critical friend to the school very effectively. Efficient minuting of governors' meetings shows the systematic attention given to developments and the regular review of policies. Generally, documentation is exemplary. The annual report to parents includes most of the required contents, including a particularly clear grid showing school improvements since the last inspection. Information is however omitted about the next election for parent governors and the arrangements for disabled pupils. Arrangements for collective worship meet requirements but these are not always carried out. Governors are kept very well informed about the school's work by the headteacher. They receive reports of the findings of monitoring as well as full details of the results of assessments and examinations results. Results are examined with care, compared with both local and national results, and checked against targets and predictions. As a result, governors have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses so that they can, and do contribute effectively to decisions about future improvement.
71. Since the last inspection there has been improvement in staffing which is now very good. All teachers are now specialists in their subject. Where staff teach a second subject this reflects comparatively recent developments for which inservice training has provided specialist experience, for example, vocational courses and ICT. Induction arrangements for newly qualified staff are good. Special educational needs staff are well qualified. Learning support for individual pupils who have a high level of special needs is co-ordinated very effectively by a *key teacher*. The teamwork and relationships among staff are positive factors in the effective delivery of this support, which benefits from links with specialist agencies and regular review meetings with senior staff. The deployment of school staff for in-class support is targeted appropriately on English, mathematics and science lessons. However, some inefficiency results from the lack of arrangements to provide support for other subjects of the curriculum so that best value is not achieved. All subject teachers do not benefit equally from the expertise the school has in learning support. This has some limiting effects on pupils' learning, for example, in geography.
72. There have been very good improvements to accommodation since the last inspection which have enhanced the quality of learning through their suitability for study. None the less, provision is no better than satisfactory overall because of new needs which have arisen. The school's success in recruitment, particularly to the sixth form, means that the new sixth form accommodation is at full capacity, with overcrowding in some activities. This is true of the library although, as a resource, it is of high quality. The quality of communication by staff and pupils in the main hall is adversely affected by the poor acoustics. This was evident in assemblies where thoughtful material was lost on many listeners because it could not be clearly heard. Poor acoustics in modern languages classrooms can prevent pupils from hearing the

spoken language clearly. There is inadequate storage in the art and design department, one of the limiting factors in the lack of three-dimensional work, and the leaking roof has damaged pupils' course-work. The school lacks an appropriate space for A-level dance work; the space currently used limits the quality of movement.

73. Good improvements have been made in ICT provision with positive effects on standards. Central resources are very good. However, subject departments lack computer equipment and cannot always gain ready access to specialist rooms because of the level of demand. Within the limits of current resourcing the deployment of computer equipment does not achieve the best value. Overall, the school provides good learning resources that support pupils' learning well. For example, books are plentiful in English and of good quality in history, but in science, resources are inadequate for the increased numbers on sixth form courses. Music resources are excellent.
74. The school actively seeks best value in all aspects of its work and generally does so exceptionally well. In addition to the features referred to in previous paragraphs, particular strengths are the consultation with parents, pupils and students in the sixth form. For example, school lunch menus are in fact pupils' menus, agreed with the full involvement of the school council; both parents and pupils were involved in the decisions about uniform change. Parents' views of the school were sought formally through questionnaire in the previous academic year. Close working links are well established with feeder primary schools, with whom the school jointly funds a bursar and a health and safety officer. There is a consortium for grounds maintenance and for cleaning. These are cost-effective and efficient developments. Systematic researching of each aspect of expenditure has resulted in savings, for example energy savings on water of £1000 a year achieved through installing smaller bore piping. The school's finances are managed extremely well to the good benefit of development priorities. Funding received for special educational needs and the various aspects of school development is properly and very effectively used to improve provision and raise standards. Monies raised from external sources are imaginatively directed at projects to enhance pupils' self-esteem and aspirations.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

75. The following key issues are in order of their importance for the school's continuing work to raise standards.

* identified school development priorities

- (1) Raise standards in
 - A* French and business studies, *through*
 - ensuring that lesson time is used to the full
 - setting suitably challenging work across the attainment range in both mixed ability and setted groups
 - providing subject specific learning targets for pupils with special needs which interpret their learning targets through the subject
 - monitoring special needs provision in subject lessons (paragraphs 7-8, 25, 34, 38, 45, 69, 70, 167, 174, 179-180)
 - B Art and design, *through*
 - providing for three-dimensional work (paragraphs 40-41, 117, 125-126)
 - C* Single science, *through*
 - Ensuring that the course programme provides for steady progression
 - Reviewing the number of subjects taken by the group of pupils taking this course (paragraphs 7, 46, 102)
- (2) Ensure that all pupils have equal access to the learning opportunities provided by the school at each stage *through*
 - planning the Year 9 curriculum to provide a sufficient basis of experience for pupils to make suitable subject choices at Key Stage 4, particularly in music and art and design
 - providing the same personal and social education programme for all pupils in each year group
 - organising the Key Stage 4 curriculum to enable pupils to study a full ICT course within the timetable
 - deploying learning support staff so that all subject departments and courses benefit from their expertise in promoting the learning of lower attainers (paragraphs 40-41, 69, 126, 144, 155, 165)
- (3) Ensure that all subjects and courses can provide ICT as an integral aspect of study *, *through*
 - maximising opportunities for all departments to use central resources
 - deploying resources across all subjects
 - implementing modified schemes of work and lesson plans incorporating work with ICT (paragraphs 41, 46, 71, 86, 98, 113, 144, 154, 164, 166, 179, 188, 199)
- (4) Seek to improve the accommodation further *, by
 - extending library facilities
 - providing sufficient working space for the growing sixth form
 - providing storage for art and design, especially for three-dimensional resources and work
 - providing a suitable space for A-level dance

- providing alternative dining room facilities so that geography teaching rooms are not used for lunch (for which plans are prepared)
- improve acoustics in the main hall so that both pupil and staff speakers can be heard clearly by their audience
- repairing roof leaks in the art and design department (paragraphs 70, 86, 126, 144, 179, 199)

76. The following areas for improvement are also identified in the report but are not included in the main areas for action to improve standards further. They should be considered for inclusion in the school's action plan.

- (1) Not all subjects plan for multicultural learning opportunities in the curriculum. (paragraph 57)
- (2) Risk assessment procedures are not yet fully implemented. (paragraph 61)
- (3) There is scope for strengthening the guidance for students joining the sixth form from other schools when GCSE results are notified. (paragraph 78)

SIXTH FORM

77. The strong sixth form plays an important role in the life of the school. A high proportion of pupils choose to stay on into Years 12 and 13 where the provision of A/ AS-level courses and foundation, intermediate and advanced GNVQ courses meets their needs and aspirations very well. Since the last inspection, the sixth form has expanded and now receives more students from St Joseph's School and a small number who apply to enter from other schools. The range of A/AS subjects is wide, covering the range of National Curriculum subjects, sociology and psychology, but not higher level courses in ICT. The three GNVQ courses in health and social care, leisure and tourism and business are now well established. There is a good balance between academic and vocational courses. Students' choices from this wide range of subjects result in some small teaching groups. None the less, sixth form organisation is efficient and cost-effective overall. A/AS-level results for the last four years show a rising trend in average points from 11.4 in 1997 to 16.7 in 1999, which was close to the national average for students taking two or more subjects. The results in 2000 show further improvement with an average points score per candidate of 20.4. Advanced GNVQ results in 1999 were close to the national average points score. All students taking intermediate courses achieved the qualification; this was significantly higher than the national pass rate.
78. A very thorough guidance procedure ensures that pupils choose courses for which they are suited. Further collaboration with St Joseph's to achieve the fullest transfer of information about entrants to the sixth form is being explored. For example, there is scope for development in ensuring that advice about final course choices begins, as it does for students from St Benedict's, when GCSE results are notified. The school offers a good curriculum to supplement sixth form examination courses. A general studies programme runs successfully alongside other courses. The school also offers students the opportunity for GCSE retakes and to take subjects that they have not previously studied. Good support is provided for students regarding their university placements. There is little non-completion of sixth form courses. Students who leave the courses usually do so for employment or to transfer to other educational establishments.
79. The new key skills course in Year 12 is very well planned. It incorporates lessons in communication, application of number and ICT. The good practice found in this course is recognised externally; for example Nottingham University has received exemplar materials. The school plans to introduce a personal and social education component which addresses the skills of working with others, improving performance and problem solving.
80. A strength of the sixth form is the extent to which the curriculum is enriched by opportunities for students to fulfil responsible and worthwhile roles in the school and the extent to which these are taken up. Students comment positively on their experience in the sixth form. They speak well of their relationship with each other and their teachers. In addition to having the opportunity to become head boy and head girl, sixth formers can be elected to the student council. Sixth formers provide support for younger pupils, for example, through running a successful lunchtime peer group-tutoring scheme for pupils with weak literacy and numerical skills. Students' work for the community is well established, for example, through running a senior citizens' party at Christmas.
81. The new sixth form accommodation provides an appropriate environment for quiet

study and a good range of resources to support individual work. Students use the centre sensibly for independent focused study. Dining facilities are also available, but the use of classrooms for eating lunch is unsatisfactory. Accommodation for Year 12 GNVQ courses is inadequate in some subject areas due to increased student numbers; a similar situation exists for sixth form work in English.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	187
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	60

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
10	27	43	17	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	1031	229
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	221	

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	33	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	224	4

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	4

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	12
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	11

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.28
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	110	104	214

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	61	69	51
	Girls	71	66	58
	Total	132	135	109
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	62 (72)	63 (67)	51 (45)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	22 (39)	39 (27)	15 (16)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	77	73	69
	Girls	82	73	73
	Total	159	146	142
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	75 (77)	69 (66)	67 (69)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	47 (40)	43 (42)	33 (30)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	98	84	182

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	40	92	98
	Girls	47	81	83
	Total	87	173	181
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	48 (43)	95 (90)	99 (97)
	National	46.6 (45)	90.9 (90)	95.8 (95)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	40 (38)
	National	38 (36)

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

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

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	45	78	123

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	11.4	18.3	16.3 (14.1)	2.1	1.9	2 (1.6)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	22	100
	National		72.9

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	3
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	5
White	1249
Any other minority ethnic group	1

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	30	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	75
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17 : 1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	14
Total aggregate hours worked per week	388

Deployment of teachers: Y7– Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78
---	----

Average teaching group size: Y7– Y11

Key Stage 3	26
Key Stage 4	23

Financial information

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

	£
Total income	2,929,473
Total expenditure	2,955,969
Expenditure per pupil	2,433
Balance brought forward from previous year	-24,018
Balance carried forward to next year	-50,514

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1260
Number of questionnaires returned	216

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	51	44	4	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	52	39	3	0	5
Behaviour in the school is good.	36	52	6	2	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	35	51	10	2	2
The teaching is good.	43	48	3	0	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	37	47	6	3	8
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	59	34	5	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	73	25	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	34	49	8	1	8
The school is well led and managed.	44	45	3	1	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	49	42	5	1	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	39	36	11	1	13

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

GCSE business studies was not inspected as a separate subject.

ENGLISH

82. The 1999 GCSE results in both English and English literature were much the same as the results nationally for both average points and for the proportion of higher grades A*-C. Girls' results have been significantly higher than those of boys. Over the last three years, average points have remained fairly stable while there has been some improvement at the higher grades. In 2000, results were much the same although the number of pupils gaining A* and A grades in English literature rose significantly.
83. In the Year 9 National Curriculum tests in 1999, results in English were close to the national average. Results were well above the national average for similar schools. Over the period 1996 to 1999 pupils' performance declined. In 2000, there was a rise in the proportion of pupils reaching the level expected in the National Curriculum tests.
84. In both A-level English and English literature, pupils' performance in 1999 was close to the national average. In 2000, all candidates passed both the English and English literature examinations.
85. On entry to the school, pupils' attainment in English is below the standard expected nationally. The standards achieved by girls are generally higher than those achieved by boys. In the work seen at Key Stage 3, standards were above those expected. Pupils are capable speakers and listeners, and their responses to the texts they read are good. They make careful and astute analyses of plot and relationships in novels and plays, basing their judgements on what characters do and say. For example, after reading *To Sir with Love* Year 9 pupils were able to identify the qualities that make a good teacher and role play a governors' interview panel appointing a new member of staff. They write in a range of styles in a convincing and appealing manner. For example, they produced attention grabbing alliterative headlines and compelling opening paragraphs based on the collapse of the bell tower after reading *The Turbulent Term of Tyke Tyler*. Handwriting is generally satisfactory. Most pupils are able to spell monosyllabic and common polysyllabic words accurately. In lessons there is a strong emphasis on the need to improve punctuation and spelling. All pupils, including those with special needs, make good progress during Key Stage 3.
86. At Key Stage 4, pupils continue to achieve standards above those expected. Girls achieve higher standards than boys, much as they do nationally. Standards in speaking and listening are good. The majority of boys and girls listen attentively. They are keen to answer questions. Where pupils are well prepared for discussions they can make sophisticated contributions and maintain discussion at a high level. In a well-planned lesson in Year 11, for example, pupils were encouraged to explore the construction of Simon Armitage's poetry. While exploring two poems, pupils used their knowledge of technical language, metre and rhyme to build up a picture of the hero. One group's understanding was clearly demonstrated by the comment 'Doing it this way makes you think. No one can tell you what to think.'
87. Reading standards at Key Stage 4 are good. A majority of pupils are able to read aloud with confidence, fluency and expression. Lower attainers are encouraged to improve the quality of their reading aloud. In the shared reading and discussion of Simon Armitage's poetry Year 11 pupils showed an understanding of significant ideas

and events. They were able to refer to the text when explaining their views. For example, one girl explained, 'The first three lines of each verse are like jabs. They're softening you up. The fourth is a knockout punch.' Standards in writing are good. The writing by girls is generally of a higher standard than that of boys. Insufficient use is made of ICT when drafting work. Pupils write for a suitable range of purposes. They produce an interesting range of extended writing. Good oral work prior to writing often helps pupils to write more extensively. For example, in a Year 10 lesson, a group preparing for a GCSE coursework assignment analysed the language, explained the planned impact and judged the effectiveness of a road safety leaflet. A boy succinctly explained the leaflet's impact: 'It's a jungle out there because the cars are predators and the bikers are prey!' Most pupils are able to improve the fluency and accuracy of their writing with re-drafting. Handwriting is generally good. Most pupils spell and punctuate accurately, well supported by the fact that in lessons there is a strong emphasis on improving punctuation and spelling.

88. In the sixth form, the students studying A-level English language produce a very good range of original work. They show a thorough knowledge of the theory of language and its development. They contribute to technical discussions about language with a fluent ease. For example, a Year 12 group were able to analyse, discuss and create text in a range of genres. Their analysis of style in a variety of texts is comprehensive and discerning. In A-level English literature, pupils show good understanding of the social context and themes of classic novels and Shakespeare's plays. They build on the critical skills acquired in Key Stage 4. For example, Year 13 students were able to identify key methods used by Shakespeare to increase dramatic tension in the final scene of *Othello*.
89. Throughout the school, well-targeted work, combined with high expectations of learning and behaviour, result in a majority of pupils making good progress. At Key Stages 3 and 4, the progress made by lower attainers and pupils with special needs is good. Pupils with English as an additional language progress at the same rate as other pupils.
90. The attitudes to learning of the majority of boys and girls are mostly very good at each stage. Most pupils are very well motivated. Teachers' excellent management of behaviour encourages pupils to co-operate so that the behaviour of most pupils is excellent. The ability of pupils to work independently and take leading roles of their own accord is good at Key Stage 4.
91. Teaching is very good, and at each stage often excellent. All teachers have an excellent knowledge of both language and literature. The majority of lessons are extremely well managed at each stage. The overall effectiveness of teachers' planning is very good, particularly the planning for individual lessons and sequences of lessons. Teachers identify the learning targets for lessons and make them clear to the pupils. In a Year 7 lesson designed to show how language can convey different meanings, the teacher made sure that learning targets were clear and that pupils appreciated the meaning of *tone* and *intonation*. This resulted in pupils showing that they had a sophisticated understanding. For example, one group cited *intonation* as evidence of sarcasm. There is very good use of constructive oral comments in lessons to help pupils to improve and written work is marked supportively. The quality and use of day-to-day assessment is good for all year groups. Homework is used very well. The stimulating range of experiences provided for pupils is one of the results of the good schemes of work developed at each stage.

92. Since the previous inspection there have been many major improvements. The overall standards attained by pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 have risen. The ability of pupils to speak clearly and with confidence in more formal situations has improved greatly: most pupils contribute enthusiastically to class discussion. The quality of teaching now is usually very good and often excellent. The English department has raised standards by: continuing to further develop initiatives to raise the achievement of boys; putting greater emphasis on teaching the use of standard English vocabulary and grammar in writing; and developing the pupils' confidence and skills to speak effectively in a wide range of situations.
93. Leadership and management in the department are excellent. The subject is making a very significant contribution to the education of all pupils in the school. The head of department provides a clear sense of direction for colleagues by her example and through a number of key initiatives. For example, these include revision classes to raise the achievement of boys and girls at Key Stage 4, and letters to parents to explain the importance of coursework. The arrangements for monitoring teaching are very effective. All members of the department share a very strong commitment to the school's aims. Documentation is comprehensive and focused. Schemes of work are well balanced and cover very well the National Curriculum and examination syllabuses. Resources for teaching, books in particular, are plentiful and well cared for. However, the lack of computers in the department for both pupils and staff and limited access to central ICT resources are a weakness. This has a detrimental effect on the work of the department and limits pupils' drafting experience. It restricts the development of the good practice seen, for example, in Year 8. Accommodation for pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4 is good and enhanced by stimulating displays that are well organised and of good quality. Accommodation for the sixth form is satisfactory although crowded.

Literacy

94. Pupils' confidence in speaking and listening is good in most subjects. Oral work in several subjects has helped to develop pupils' speaking and listening skills. For example, very good opportunities for discussion are provided in art and design where pupils are encouraged to exchange and develop ideas. In physical education, teachers involve Key Stage 4 pupils in extended explanations often asking the question, 'Why do you think that?' Pupils are encouraged to read from a range of texts, use reference texts and read aloud. For example, in history pupils are provided with opportunities to read from a good range of quality texts. In geography, history and modern languages, and in GNVQ courses, pupils are able to read to the class. In many subjects, pupils are provided with opportunities for different kinds of writing. For example, in GNVQ courses, pupils make notes, create questionnaires and prepare reports. Good work in analytical writing is a feature in geography. Developing imagination is a strong feature of writing in history. Overall, the level of competence is good at both key stages and in the sixth form.

MATHEMATICS

95. In 1999, GCSE results for all pupils, and for both boys and girls, were close to the national average. Boys performed as well in mathematics as in their other subjects while girls performed less well than in others. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher grades A*-C was slightly higher than the national average. Standards have improved at a faster rate than they have nationally. Since the last inspection, when results at A*-G were below the national average, the proportion of pupils gaining A*-G grades range has been consistently close to the national average. In 2000, both girls'

and boys' results dipped; this reflected their 1998 Year 9 test results. While the proportion of the highest grades A*, A and B was maintained, the proportion of grades D and E increased significantly.

96. At A-level in 1999, six of the eleven students entered gained a graded pass: two A grades, one C and three D grades. The average points score was below the national average. The two students taking further mathematics gained a grade A and B. Below average results were reported at the last inspection. Results in 2000 saw a significant improvement: the nine students entered gained grades A-D, with five A and three B grades and an average points score well above the national average for 1999. All three students taking A-level further mathematics gained A grades; the student taking AS-level gained a grade C.
97. In 1999, the Year 9 national test results were above the national average points scores, and well above average when compared with schools with a similar intake. The proportions of pupils reaching both the expected level and the higher level were close to the national average. Pupils performed a little better in mathematics than in English, and significantly better than in science. Teacher assessments of pupil attainment are close to the test results. The trend in results since 1996 is much the same as the national trend: there was a significant dip in results in 1998, good recovery in 1999, and in 2000 further improvement with three-quarters of pupils obtaining levels at least in line with the standards expected. On entry, pupils' attainment overall is below the standard expected for their age. They make good progress over Key Stage 3 so that in 1999 their results were about average. The 2000 results showed further improvement, particularly for boys who, for the first time, performed better than girls. Although in other years girls have generally produced slightly better results than boys, the difference reflected the national difference.
98. In the work seen at Key Stage 3, pupils' attainment is at the standard expected across the various aspects of the subject. Pupils are competent in the manipulation of algebraic symbols, show that they can interpret and illustrate statistical data and know the names and properties of the most common geometrical shapes. They can explain their work using appropriate mathematical vocabulary. The level of accuracy in routine calculations is improving, particularly in Year 7, reflecting the positive effect of the National Numeracy Strategy. Pupils' progress across the key stage is good, including the progress of pupils with special needs.
99. At Key Stage 4, attainment is maintained at the expected standard. Pupils across the attainment range generally achieve the standards of which they are capable. They have a satisfactory repertoire of mathematical vocabulary, solve equations of varying complexity, construct algebraic and statistical graphs and consolidate their computational skills. Because the work is planned to meet the learning needs of different groups of pupils, all pupils undertake appropriate levels of work in each of the areas of mathematics. For a significant number of pupils, weaknesses in mental arithmetic, rather than a failure to understand the mathematics, sometimes lead to incorrect or inaccurate answers.
100. Attainment in the sixth form is now above the standard expected. There has been a substantial increase in the number of students studying A-level mathematics. The work seen shows that they are making good progress and producing work of a standard appropriate to give them the opportunity of gaining the highest grades. All students study the application of number course within the key skills programme. The standard of work is higher than is typically seen on similar courses.

101. Across the school, pupils sustain concentration when working and they have a positive attitude to the study of mathematics. Even in the minority of lessons where the teaching methods do not inspire involvement, pupils show that they are well motivated and receptive. This is because of the excellent relationships between almost all teachers and pupils. It is mainly because of the strength of these relationships that pupils with special needs generally make good progress. Teachers know their pupils well and, although there are few examples of specific mathematical targets in pupils' individual learning plans, they have the command of subject that enables them to identify and comprehend pupils' misconceptions.
102. Teaching is good. It is marginally better at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 4, and best in the sixth form. It is very good or excellent in about a quarter of lessons. All teachers have a good command of the subject and share a commitment to improving pupils' achievements. Lesson planning is good. The content is invariably structured to build on previous learning; consolidation and practice are usually accompanied by the acquisition of new knowledge and skills.
103. In the best lessons, the teacher radiates an enthusiasm for the subject, fully involves the pupils when presenting work, engenders a brisk pace and sets realistic, timed tasks that are well matched to individual needs. In such lessons, pupils respond with high interest and work at a good rate. For example, a group of Key Stage 3 pupils was enthusiastically involved in investigating the range of ways for applying the four rules of number to a given set of numbers in order to arrive at a given answer. The teacher's skilful questioning included calculations with brackets to ensure that pupils were suitably challenged and able to make considered choices and identify alternative solutions. The teacher punctuated the lesson by imposing appropriate time limits that ensured that all pupils moved on to tackle increasingly searching questions. The variety of tasks sustained pupils' interest. In the sixth form, students were fully engaged with the teacher in discussing the various standard formulae associated with straight-line graphs. The teacher's subject competence and obvious enthusiasm were reflected in students' response and in their resulting levels of understanding and progress. On both occasions, the pupils related to the teacher in a studious way and the teacher's ability to understand any difficulties they experienced ensured that their progress and learning were well promoted.
104. In less successful lessons, the teacher's influence on pupils' learning is diminished because the explanations and discussions are too limited to clarify points of confusion. In such lessons, the teacher sometimes uses the textbook as a tool for instruction and, because their attention is divided between textbook and teacher, pupils can become distracted. A lack of pace and challenge can follow because the explanations have to be given again on an individual basis. For example, a group of Key Stage 4 pupils, calculating various ratios successfully, produced a suitable quantity of examples. Because the teacher's time was devoted to helping individual pupils, and ideas were not shared with the class or time targets set, the pace of the lesson was not brisk enough. There was therefore no time for moving on to explore questions of greater depth.
105. Although there are many examples of very good written work, the quality of presentation varies significantly. Work is generally tidy, but learning is sometimes impeded because the presentation lacks structure and so does not help a secure understanding. In addition, particularly in algebra, a lack of well-ordered layouts sometimes inhibits progress. There is insufficient use of ICT to support learning in mathematics. This was raised in the previous inspection report and remains an issue. Except in Year 7, ICT is not incorporated in schemes of work.

106. A promising start has been made in assembling and utilising a database of pupil performance for determining teaching groups and setting target grades and levels. Although assessment procedures are satisfactory, all teachers do not consistently apply them. The link between day-to-day assessment and performance data is not sufficiently established to capitalise fully on all of the information. The potential for developing subject specific individual pupil targets that are shared with the pupils, and the scope for using assessment data to improve schemes of work, are recognised by the department.
107. Department resources are efficiently managed and utilised. Schemes of work are satisfactory and are continuously evolving to take account of external changes and considered changes in approaches. However, the monitoring role of the head of department is not yet of a sufficiently high profile to ensure that good practice is shared and that procedures are consistently applied. The subject development plan, although correctly identifying the areas for taking the department forward, lacks a sharpness of focus and does not include the criteria for determining the success of actions taken. There is, therefore, a lack of clarity in spelling out and influencing the educational direction of the subject.

Numeracy

108. Numerical proficiency across the curriculum is satisfactory throughout the school. Pupils demonstrate that they can apply numeracy skills in a variety of contexts, and their levels of numerical competence often support their work in a range of subjects. There were no instances observed in other subjects of a lack of numerical skills having an adverse affect on attainment and progress. In science, pupils accurately use a variety of measurement and graphical techniques and in physics they show that they are competent in rearranging formulae, although there are limited opportunities for developing number skills. In modern languages, pupils handle statistical information confidently and understand the results of various surveys conducted in the target language. Pupils in design and technology show that they are confident with numbers and that they can measure materials accurately. Their spatial awareness is good and enhances two and three-dimensional modelling.

SCIENCE

109. The majority of pupils are entered for the double award in science at GCSE. In 1999, results for both boys and girls were significantly above the national average. Boys' and girls' results were much the same, as they were nationally. Pupils did as well in double science as they did in other subjects which reflects the national picture. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher A*-C grades was above the national average. Results in 2000 showed a fall, bringing them closer to the national average for 1999. The numbers entered for the single award in science were doubled in 1999. While results were close to the national average points score, the proportion gaining a graded pass A*-G was below the national average. Pupils taking single science gained poorer results than they did in other subjects; this compares unfavourably with the national picture. About half the pupils taking single science also gained merits in the certificate of health, hygiene and safety.
110. Pupils have open access to sixth form courses in the separate science disciplines, for which there are no specific entry requirements. In 1999, the points scores were below the national average in chemistry and physics and well below in biology. There was an improvement in 2000 in both chemistry and physics bringing the points scores to the national average for 1999 in chemistry, and close to it in physics. Biology results were very poor. In 1999, 16 of the 26 entries across the three subjects received a graded pass, five at A-B. In 2000, 17 of the 32 entries received a graded pass, 11 at A-B.
111. In 1999, the results of the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 were below the national average. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected level was close to the national average, but the proportion reaching the higher level was below average. Results in 2000 show improvement in the proportion reaching the higher level. The trend over the period 1997-1999 is a falling one, while nationally the fall is slight. The standards reached by pupils in this school are above those reached by pupils in similar schools. Pupils' standards in science are lower than in English and mathematics. There is no significant variation in the standards of boys and girls.
112. For many pupils, prior attainment in science and basic skills are poor when they enter the school. At Key Stage 3, the work seen is at the expected standard and supports the view that standards are improving. Pupils have a good grasp of a wide range of scientific ideas and their basic skills have improved, especially those related to practical work in science. A middle group of Year 9 pupils understood how plants are adapted to encourage pollination either by wind or animals; a Year 8 group, including pupils with special needs used appropriate scientific vocabulary to describe fertilisation in plants. Pupils can confidently explain their ideas about chemical reactions using particle theory. Those with special needs can test solutions to detect sugar or starch and explain the significance of their findings. Improvements in standards at Key Stage 3 are due, in part, to the careful matching of tasks to pupils' attainment, and equally careful matching of the level of work reached in class with the tier of examination entry. A more rigorous approach to revision has also had a positive impact.

113. At Key Stage 4, the work seen was above the standard expected. Pupils have a good grasp of the science involved in life processes, materials and physical processes. Higher attainers confidently explain how atoms are bonded in hydrocarbon molecules and predict the characteristics of other alkanes. Some work showed thoughtful analysis of results, and a searching evaluation of the completed task in an experiment to find the electrical resistance of a wire. Pupils with special educational needs could discuss aspects of hygiene relating to a food store and identify potential hazards in the home from a video clip. Improvements in standards have been achieved by targeting pre-examination support for pupils expected to gain borderline grades, and by ensuring that all pupils complete coursework to the best of their ability.
114. In the sixth form, the work seen was above the standard expected. Students show a good grasp of the work set and are articulate and confident in discussion. In chemistry they showed a particular concern for accuracy in a titration experiment; physics students were able to find the relationship between the temperature and resistance of a thermistor experimentally and discuss the significance of the results. Biology students planned individual experiments to find the effect of the substrate on the growth of yeast and achieved valid results. They investigated the changes in the osmotic potential of cells in a potato tuber in a variety of solutions. In these experiments, the knowledge gained in key skills equipped students to deal with the mathematical concepts involved. The work seen is better than would be expected by the 1999 examination results.
115. Throughout the school pupils show a positive attitude to science. At Key Stage 3, pupils are keen to answer questions and are interested in the tasks set, especially those in the guise of quizzes and competitions. Opportunities for them to work independently are, however, limited in some lessons. At Key Stage 4, pupils' reports of science investigations show that they take pride in their work and have developed very good presentational skills. In the sixth form, students regularly give up their own time to take daily readings for experiments in biology. At all stages, pupils behave well and work safely and sensibly in the laboratory. They collaborate effectively to complete tasks and can be trusted to handle apparatus carefully. A minority of pupils need support from the teacher to help them sustain concentration.
116. Teaching is good throughout the school. All teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of their subject, teach confidently and illustrate their ideas with examples from everyday life. On entry to the school, pupils are put into groups according to their prior attainment and this enables teachers to match their lesson planning closely to pupils' attainment levels. There can be, and is, movement between groups for different topics so that pupils can be suitably challenged by the level of work. This encourages them to make maximum effort. Many lessons start with questioning about previous work which helps pupils to relate the new learning to what they have learned before. These questions often require very simple answers that catch pupils' interest. The introduction of CASE (Cognitive Acceleration in Science Education) is having a positive effect on the development of pupils' thinking skills, particularly in investigative work. At both key stages, teachers use a wide range of teaching methods to make science interesting, including short demonstrations, video clips, challenges such as designing circuits for a variety of household tasks, and a wide variety of practical tasks. For example, Year 8 pupils, some with special educational needs, enjoyed making a quiz board which lit up when the correct answer was chosen. In a Key Stage 4 biology lesson, the use of the flexicam to project the image from the microscope on to the wall enabled pupils to see the process of

evaporation from the underside of a leaf by viewing it at great magnification. At Key Stage 3, teachers pay good attention to the correct use of scientific vocabulary and provide opportunities for pupils to read aloud from the text. There are limited opportunities for developing number skills.

117. Teachers manage pupils well. They have high expectations of their pupils, providing challenging tasks, not merely extra work for quick learners. Lessons in which pupils share experiences and discuss ideas together are more effective than the minority of lessons where the teacher is the most active person. In the sixth form, very good relationships ensure that all students are actively involved in learning. Well-planned lessons provide a good range of opportunities for pupils to set up their own experiments, for example to study chemical equilibria in chemistry and the relationship between temperature and resistance of a thermistor in physics. All lessons are taught at a brisk pace, especially in the sixth form, where the 50-minute time slots can be a constraint on how much can be achieved. Homework is regularly set and marked at all stages and the detail evident in the marking is usually sufficient to enable pupils to improve their standard. However, there are isolated incidents of marking lacking detail and of homework tasks being undemanding.
118. At both key stages, pupils with special educational needs are well supported by learning support staff and by science teachers giving extra support in lessons. Teaching styles are adjusted to take account of their needs so that they make suitable progress; this is good at Key Stage 3. Higher attainers make good progress; work is well matched to their needs in higher ability groups. Tests and other written material take account of pupils' reading age. In the sixth form the very good relationships between staff and students enable all to participate in discussion, explore problem areas and ensure that their own understanding is secure. In some lessons, pupils explained their ideas to the rest of the class and these were well received. However, there were few examples of pupils presenting new work or putting forward a cogent argument.
119. Since the last inspection there have been significant improvements in the standards at all stages. Monitoring and evaluation of pupils' work, teachers' planning, homework, the introduction of classroom observations and the sharing of best practice have all led to improvement in learning and consequent raising of standards. The quality of teaching has improved so that no unsatisfactory teaching was seen. In the sixth form, the change to modular A-level courses has improved motivation and consequently improved standards. As a result, more students are choosing to continue their studies in the sixth form. Schemes of work have been extensively reviewed and brought up to date with Curriculum 2000.
120. The science department is well led and effectively managed. The strategies recently put in place are beginning to raise standards. These have included a review of teaching styles, a programme of monitoring and evaluating teachers' planning, and classroom observations. They have led to the sharing of very successful methods with consequent improvements in pupils' learning. Teacher interviews with groups of pupils to identify areas of concern have proved effective in improving methods. A science department financial committee now has responsibility for determining budget priorities and this has led to a better focus on development planning. The provision of learning resources is currently unsatisfactory, especially text books for new sixth form courses. This is due to an unexpected influx of students into the new AS-level courses. While the support given by the technicians is very good, it is now stretched to the maximum. Arrangements for pupils to use ICT are unsatisfactory due

to limited access to appropriate equipment. Schemes of work incorporate ICT and will be fully implemented once the equipment becomes available.

ART AND DESIGN

121. GCSE results were close to the national average in 1999. The performance of the girls was well above the average for girls, while that of the boys was well below. These results overall reflect a significant improvement since the last inspection. The proportions of pupils gaining the higher grades A*-C was close to the national average. The 2000 results were much the same as in 1999.
122. Three students took A-level examinations in 1999 and all gained a grade C. Their average points score compared favourably with the average points across all subjects.
123. In 1999, the Year 9 teacher assessment showed attainment below the expected standard. There was good improvement in 2000.
124. At Key Stage 3, the work seen meets the standard expected. Pupils have well-developed skills of drawing, colour and composition, and use them to produce a variety of decorative effects. They are beginning to use subject terminology with some confidence. At the last inspection, drawing was identified as a weakness. It is now taught from Year 7 onwards, as is work in three dimensions using papier maché, wire and other materials. Ceramics and work with clay are not introduced until Year 9. Critical studies, another reported weakness, now has a much higher profile in the department with pupils learning about famous artists and designers from Year 7 onwards.
125. The work seen at Key Stage 4 is at the standard expected. There is good observational drawing by a number of pupils. This draws on information gathered from a range of primary and secondary sources to produce a variety of painting and drawing, packaging, poster and publicity work. Not all Year 11 pupils' sketchbooks were available. In those seen, there was a surprising lack of sketchbook working. There is still too much figure drawing from imagination.
126. In the sixth form, the work seen is at the expected standard, and reflects the abilities of the students. Observational and analytical drawing is much improved. Curriculum 2000 requires increased investigation and experimentation and a different approach to critical studies. The work seen indicates that these requirements are being met although, as in the earlier years, there is still a minority of pupils who fail to recognise observational drawing as the way to collect information or experiment with shape, form and process. Often source material is of poor quality: the students' photographs or those taken from magazines are often weak reference points.
127. Allowing for the varied experiences of art and design that the pupils have had when they arrive in the school, their achievement at Key Stages 3 and 4 is good. Pupils with special needs make satisfactory progress. The reluctance of a minority of sixth form students to carry out the depth of research necessary to develop the required personal view or advanced level skills means that their achievement is no better than satisfactory.
128. Pupils' attitudes are very good and a very positive feature of the department. Classes are well behaved and respond with creativity and reflection to the welcoming atmosphere and to their teachers' caring manner. Pupils want to improve and do well

and are pleased to explain their work to classmates and visitors alike. In Years 7 to 9, the girls are usually quicker at settling to work while their preparation and research tend to be more thorough than that of the boys. Behaviour, including that of potentially difficult pupils, is usually excellent. Students working in the sixth form studio show good independent study skills; the development of these has been well supported by the teachers.

129. Teaching is good overall. In one lesson at Key Stage 3 it was excellent and in one it was unsatisfactory. Generally, the best teaching is at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, where it is very good. A particularly good lesson required pupils to make freehand modifications to basic letter shapes to create inventive ways of presenting the alphabet. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subject are a particular strength. Teachers care about their subject, and, more importantly, for their pupils. Teaching is now more closely linked to learning than at the last inspection although there are a few occasions when this link is not strong enough. Very good lessons usually start by the teacher identifying what the class will learn and with revision of previous learning. Initial discussions and demonstrations of processes are often excellent. There is good coverage of the rudiments of colour, while the very best lessons contain an element of discovery in discussion and practical work. There is an excellent emphasis on procedure, methods and care of equipment. Homework is regularly set and appropriate, and equally regularly, marked and handed back.
130. Throughout the department, the teachers' attitudes and good relationships with their pupils generate good co-operation. Pupils are well managed. A good characteristic of the teaching is the way the teacher circulates, assessing the work, correcting, praising and encouraging the pupils. Definitions of new words are carefully explained and this makes a good contribution to pupils' literacy development. Equally good is the way sketchbooks and the work of former pupils are used as examples of good working methods. In the unsatisfactory lesson seen, the basic skills were not well taught and the teacher had unusually low expectations of the class. In this lesson, there was too great an emphasis on copying images from books and neither the lower attainers nor the more gifted pupils were engaged by the task. Usually, the teachers take the opportunity to relate work to that of famous artists and designers and are quick to challenge idleness or lack of creative effort in their pupils. A further department strength is that lesson objectives allow students opportunities to interpret tasks in their own way and learn individually. An artist-in-residence works with the pupils each year giving them experience of a range of activities including ceramics and wood-carving.
131. Improvements since the last inspection have been very good. Standards of attainment have improved significantly, as have the quality of teaching and the leadership and management of the department. The quality of the research and investigation through drawing has also improved. The department is now effective.

132. Leadership and management of the department are very good and provide clear direction for the subject. The assessment of pupils' work is very good at all stages, and reflects the professional approach of the head of department who, after a year as acting head of department, took up her substantive post in September 1996. This approach has resulted in the very good improvements in the department and the good awareness of what still needs to be done. Procedures are not sufficiently in place for ensuring that the needs of all pupils across the attainment range are fully met; for example, there are no subject-specific learning targets in the individual plans for pupils with special needs. There is a lack of systematic monitoring of teaching across the subject to ensure that standards are appropriately high. Three-dimensional work is not sufficiently incorporated into schemes of work. ICT is neglected but due to figure in the department's activities from December 2000.
133. Accommodation is unsatisfactory: the roof leaks, damaging work and stock. The sixth form studio, the former departmental office, is too small for the number of students using it. An almost complete lack of storage space prevents sculpture and ceramics being at the centre of the department's activities. The arrangement whereby art and design is taught for two lessons a week in Years 7 and 8 and for one in Year 9 does not support pupils' experience well at the time when they are choosing GCSE courses.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

134. The 1999 GCSE results were a little above the national average for points scores while significantly above average for the proportion gaining the higher grades A*-C. Girls' results were significantly high, and overall there was been good improvement from 1998. Pupils did better in design and technology than they did in their other subjects. This compared favourably with the national picture. In 2000, the quality of results was maintained.
135. At A-level in 1999, five of the seven students entered gained a grade pass C-E, three with C grades. Pupils' performance in 2000 was much improved. All students gained grades A-D, with one grade A and three grade Cs. The number of entries has remained constant, but in the present Year 12 and Year 13 there is a significant rise in the number of pupils studying AS/A-level, including a higher proportion of girls.
136. In the Year 9 National Curriculum teacher assessments in 1999, results were significantly above those reported nationally. There has been steady improvement in the proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard as well as in the proportion reaching the higher levels. In 2000, these standards were maintained.
137. In the work seen at Key Stage 3, standards were above those expected nationally. There is a marked improvement in standards as pupils move through the key stage. Pupils' designing and making skills are good. Graphic skills are generally above average and are developed through designing and making activities. Pupils manage their individual projects well using a variety of materials. The projects provide a firm foundation for later work. Pupils demonstrate very good practice in relation to health and safety, using equipment responsibly. Skills using CAD/CAM (Computer-Assisted Design and Computer-Assisted Manufacturing) develop well.

138. At Key Stage 4, the standard of pupils' work is well above that expected for their age. Pupils employ correct methods of investigation, research and modelling. Their knowledge of nutrition and ability to adapt recipes are good. Pupils in Year 11 studying food show a good understanding of batch production and industrial practices. Project work in graphics and resistant materials shows good use of sketching techniques to develop ideas. Higher attainers have carried out some excellent research to support their chosen designs in resistant materials, and in food technology to support their evaluation of specialist dietary meals. Pupils of all abilities become increasingly able to organise their own work as they move through the key stage. All pupils, including those with special needs, make good progress.
139. In the sixth form, the work seen continues to be at a standard well above that expected. Students studying AS/A-level produce a very good variety of original designs. Their graphic skills are well developed alongside a clear understanding of material properties and processes. In food, high-level investigation skills are developed, for example when researching fermentation. Links with higher education institutions specialising, for example, in industrial design, are not strongly enough established to ensure that students considering the next stage of their education are well informed of all career opportunities relating to designing and manufacturing.
140. The vast majority of pupils have very positive attitudes towards design and technology and obviously enjoy the subject. Behaviour in lessons is excellent. Pupils often help each other and their relationships with teachers are excellent. These high quality relationships help to promote positive attitudes to learning. Pupils take full advantage of the extra-curricular time available which makes a significant contribution to their attainment. Alongside these opportunities, and for the last three years, the school has achieved national recognition with the *Young Engineers* club supported by BNFL.
141. Teaching is good overall and very good at Key Stage 4. The common characteristic of all teachers is their commitment and enthusiasm; these are caught by pupils so that they approach the subject in the same way. Lessons are well planned and skilfully managed, with very good levels of supervision. Planning is linked directly to the very comprehensive schemes of work. In the best lessons, pupils are made well aware of the learning targets as well as what they are expected to do. Teachers give appropriate attention and advice to all pupils and with sensitivity to pupils with special needs. Their encouraging manner engenders confidence and enables pupils, for example in food, to take calculated risks when adapting recipes. Specialist teachers have good subject knowledge and their expertise and experience are well used. Homework is regularly set and marked carefully. Pupils with special educational needs receive a high level of individual support, to good effect.
142. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. Teaching is now good. Standards overall have improved, particularly girls' achievements at GCSE; pupils often make very good progress. Pupils' illustrative techniques have steadily improved following the introduction of GCSE graphic products in 1998.
143. Leadership and management in the two main areas of the subject are very good. The role of the heads of area in monitoring and evaluating the department's work is developing well. There is a clear sense of direction and a focus on achieving high standards, with good evaluation of examination results to help achieve this. Staff have worked diligently to develop a range of appropriate policies which provide good guidelines for all staff to move forward towards common goals. The technicians make a valuable contribution to the smooth running of the department. Resources are used well. Curriculum planning is good although not enough thought is given to

pupils' cultural development. There are good procedures for assessment and reporting; moderation meetings ensure consistency across the two main areas. Good refurbishment of design and technology rooms is in process. However, the distance between the accommodation for each area makes day-to-day communication and discussion difficult; suitable arrangements for department meetings are not in place. Opportunities for display are used to good effect, not only to celebrate achievement, but also to stimulate pupils' ideas during lessons.

GEOGRAPHY

144. In 1999, results at GCSE were much the same as the national averages for points scores, for the proportion of pupils gaining a pass and the proportion gaining the higher grades A*-C. Pupils did as well in geography as they did in their other subjects, as happened nationally. Results have fluctuated since the last inspection, showing improvement from 1998. In 2000, they showed a fall. In recent years, there has been a reduction in the number of entries in geography, with fewer girls than boys taking the subject. In 1999, girls' results were at the national average (for girls) and boys' results were somewhat higher.
145. At A-level in 1999, 16 of the 20 students entered gained a graded pass A-E. The proportion gaining an A-E grade was below the national average, as was the school's average points score. In 2000, all the six students taking the examination gained grades A-E.
146. In 1999, the Year 9 teacher assessments were well above those reported nationally. From entry, when overall pupils' attainment is below average, these results represent very good progress. In 2000, the results were much the same.
147. In the work seen, attainment at Key Stage 3 above the standard expected is better than expected given pupils' attainment on entry. This confirms the very good progress pupils make. There is little difference in attainment between boys and girls. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. In Years 7 and 8, pupils are encouraged in developing geographical knowledge and skills and most use technical terms well. Year 9 pupils have a good grasp of spatial and environmental issues and knowledge of levels of world development. They present maps, diagrams and illustrations well on a range of topics and their ability to take notes from a variety of sources – visual, map, diagram and written text – is usually well developed. Pupils' ability to contribute constructively in question and answer sessions or in group discussions is good.
148. At Key Stage 4, attainment in the work seen is at the expected standard. Pupils have a sound knowledge and understanding and the geographical skills required for examination. However, the failure to complete and submit the fieldwork component is a recurrent theme and has a negative effect on the results. Differences in attainment between boys and girls have varied in recent years with far fewer girls studying geography to examination level.

149. In the sixth form, students are working at the expected standard and build suitably on their prior attainment. A-level students show a sound theoretical understanding of the organic components of soil relating it with the findings of their field studies in the Isle of Arran. Advanced GNVQ students on the leisure and tourism course make effective comparisons of programmes for travel to long-haul destinations offered by different tour operators. They use both description and analysis competently.
150. In almost all lessons behaviour is very good and pupils show considerable interest and enthusiasm. They have good relationships with each other and usually with their teachers. At Key Stage 4, a minority of pupils lack motivation and do not manage their study time well. This can affect the completion of the fieldwork component of the course and have a negative effect on the results.
151. Teaching overall is good; in almost half the lessons seen it was very good. Good teaching in the sixth form is reflected in the improving standards at A-level and in GNVQ leisure/travel and tourism courses. Much of the good teaching is a reflection of staff expertise and subject knowledge and the good relationships between staff and pupils evident throughout the department. Where improvement is needed, more at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3, it is to ensure that a planned sequence of clear learning targets is identified and that lessons have sufficient pace and challenge for pupils to learn well. Teachers use an impressive variety of methods to which pupils respond well in group work, individual study and class discussion. Lessons were best when there were timed activities for meeting clear targets and teachers pushed the pace, whatever the topic. Particularly effective lessons were seen on migration, push and pull factors, Ordnance Survey mapwork symbols and long-haul holidays in GNVQ. In these, tasks were well timed and matched to the needs of the pupils. There was sensitive handling of topics on population growth, political issues in China and ethnic minority groupings in British cities. The subject contributes well to the school's ethos and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its pupils. However, the school's policy is not always applied in the marking of pupils' work. Helpful comments on how the work can be improved are not always included and not all work is marked regularly.
152. Good progress has been made since the last inspection. There is now a full team of subject specialists, a greater variety of teaching methods is used and pupils actively participate in lessons.
153. The department is effectively led, staff work very well as a team and there is much carefully recorded documentation. The process of target setting and effective monitoring and evaluation is developing and there is a growing bank of data on pupils' assessments to judge their progress over time. Although generally the curriculum meets requirements, opportunities for pupils to use ICT are greatly restricted by the lack of equipment. Plans for the future rectify the current absence of fieldwork at Key Stage 3. Schemes of work are not sufficiently adapted to ensure that work matches pupils' different levels of attainment. There is no allocation of learning support time to the department beyond Year 7 although there are other classes where it is needed. Resources are up-to-date with many fine examples of home-produced materials to aid learning. There are some shortages of texts at Key Stage 4 which affect pupils' learning adversely. Wall displays contribute to an active learning environment in classrooms. The use of geography classrooms for the overflow from the dining room is unsatisfactory.

HISTORY

154. In 1999, GCSE results in history were above the national average. Nearly half the year group took the examination. Overall, pupils did better in history than they did in their other subjects; this compared favourably with the picture nationally. This was true for girls. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher grades A*-C was significantly above the national average, with boys outperforming girls at A* and A grades. In 2000, the provisional results were much the same as in 1999. There was a fall in the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C, particularly among girls.
155. At A-level in 1999, the 12 students entered gained grades C-D, eight gaining a C. The average points score was close to the national average. In 2000, the average points score was much the same as in 1999 for the eight students entered. The size of groups in the sixth form is too small to make comparisons between boys' and girls' results. Attainment trends are recognised by the department which has begun to consider strategies for pupils of lower prior attainment, including more structured approaches to revision.
156. Standards in the 1999 teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 were above those reported nationally. Boys did slightly better than their age group nationally and girls performed well above the national average. Standards were maintained in 2000, although boys' attainment more closely reflected that of girls.
157. On entry to the school, pupils' attainment in literacy is lower than the standard expected nationally. In the work seen, standards are above those expected at the end of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Pupils with special needs make good progress. At Key Stage 3, pupils are confident in their explorations of the past, for example in understanding the subtleties and complexities of Indian culture in North West America during the nineteenth century. They can distinguish well between myth and reality and between primary and secondary sources, for example in work on religious change. They can begin to formulate and test simple hypotheses about a range of made objects dating from prehistoric to more recent times. Pupils across the attainment range participate effectively in role-play, for example in Year 9 work about indigenous American peoples. In each year group, pupils' oral skills and their skills in group discussion progress well. Pupils use appropriate historical vocabulary competently.
158. At Key Stage 4, the work seen shows that pupils continue to achieve high standards. They are increasingly able to learn from each other, for example in Year 11 discussion on the reasons why government challenged the basis of the *Old Poor Law*. More significantly, pupils can comprehend, compare and contrast a widening range of pictorial, documentary and secondary evidence obtained from an appropriate variety of sources, including oral history. This included work retrieving material on World War II from the Internet as well as local fieldwork in nearby Whitehaven.
159. In the sixth form, standards in the work continue to be above those expected. Students show sound skills in documentary analysis and are aware of author bias. They have a good grasp of key terminology, for example, *papal bull* and *excommunication*, for the study of religious controversy in the sixteenth century. Students can sense the audience for which particular letters and reports were written, for example in work on fifteenth century diplomatic history.
160. Throughout the key stages, pupils' attitudes to learning are very good. They enjoy history. Concentration is high and pupils of all abilities are keen to do well; they are willing to question staff when something is not clear. Pupils show respect for others' opinions, for example in a sixth form discussion of documentary bias, or when lower attainers in Year 7 learn about the Roman Empire. Pupils across the attainment

- range work enthusiastically in groups and learn well from doing so. Record-keeping and note-taking skills are not always handled sufficiently well, and girls are sometimes more diffident in class discussions, especially at Key Stage 3. The progress of pupils with special educational needs, especially in oral work and discussion, is above what would be expected, particularly at Key Stage 3.
161. Teaching is very good at all stages and sometimes excellent; it promotes high standards. There is a vibrant enthusiasm for the importance and relevance of history. This has a strong impact on pupils' learning across the attainment range, including the learning of lower attainers in Year 7. Teachers use praise and reward judiciously, raising pupils' self-esteem, particularly at Key Stage 3 and in mixed ability groups in the sixth form. There is a skilful balance between historical content in lessons and the skills of behaving like a historian. Lesson pace is invariably brisk. High quality resources, ranging from carefully selected artefacts to modern texts and excellent laminated pictorial materials, are used very effectively. Learning targets are usually clearly stated, although in the sixth form, the 'why' of studying particular issues, for example on fifteenth century documentary analysis, needs to be made sufficiently clear for students of all prior attainment. Teachers give good support to individual pupils.
162. Teaching is highly effective in building ideas, with good use of techniques such as mind-mapping and brainstorming, and careful questioning to ensure that pupils are understanding clearly. As one pupil remarked, 'I never realised I could understand what it was like to be a Tlingit Indian'. Learning is a vivid experience and pupils' recall of historical knowledge is consequently above national expectations. Pupils demonstrate higher level skills such as transferring learning to new contexts, for example, a Year 11 pupil drew comparisons between food supply in the two world wars. Marking is prompt and supportive but precise targets for improvement are not always identified at each stage. Overall, the quality of teaching results in deepening understanding and greater independence of thinking for pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs.
163. Satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection. Resources are much improved, for example in terms of artefacts and good quality class texts. As a consequence, there is less reliance on worksheets. Computers have been acquired to support class work, although software for stimulating higher order skills such as the analysis of data and hypothesis testing has not yet been acquired. Pupils' oral skills across the range of attainment, including those of pupils with special educational needs, are much improved, although by comparison, written work is undeveloped, especially at Key Stage 3. There are increased opportunities for history visits to places of historical interest. For example, there have been visits to the Imperial War Museum, a site investigation at Whitehaven town centre, and visits to see the Bayeux Tapestry during the annual visit to France.

164. Leadership and management of the subject are very good and make a positive contribution to pupils' learning, particularly those of average ability and above. Documentation is well-focused and purposeful and teachers share a commitment to effective and proven teaching and learning strategies. The department has prepared well for the National Curriculum 2000 and recruitment to the newly-introduced AS-level is healthy. Information from assessment is being used well. Resources are adequate, although some Year 7 pupils have to share class texts. Books are of good quality and well matched to the learning needs of pupils of average ability and above. Accommodation is adequate: because some teaching space is taken up for storing equipment the opportunities for adopting more flexible teaching and learning activities, such as role-play are restricted. The quality of display is extremely high although it includes little annotated pupil work to help raise expectations. Staff development is generally good but has not included enough specific skills training for supporting pupils with moderate and specific learning difficulties. History is a popular option at both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

INFORMATION COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

165. In the GCSE short course in 1999, taken by 106 pupils, the average points score was below the national average. Almost all pupils gained a graded pass at grades A*-E. The proportion gaining the higher grades A*-C was low. The two boys taking the full GCSE course gained grade A and D. In 2000, the points score improved to become close to the national average for 1999. 13 pupils took the full GCSE course gaining grades A*-E, six gaining higher grades A*-C.
166. At Key Stage 3 in 1999, the Year 9 teacher assessments were well above those reported nationally. In 2000, results were similar to those reported nationally in 1999.
167. The work seen at Key Stage 3 is at the standard expected. Pupils with special needs make good progress. In Year 9, pupils understand different field types such as numeric and date and how to set up databases. They are able to modify the layout of databases to improve presentation and use data capture sheets effectively to collect information. The majority of pupils have a good understanding of the storage of data in a database. Higher attainers have good keyboard skills and can enter data both quickly and accurately. In Year 7, pupils understand how to log on to the network and are able to access a variety of software programmes. They can select a variety of font styles and sizes and use them effectively. Pupils in Year 8 have a satisfactory understanding of spreadsheets. They are able to create spreadsheets and enter data; higher attainers work more quickly and accurately on this task.
168. At Key Stage 4, the work seen is maintained at the standard expected. In Year 11, pupils following the short course unit in communication make effective use of a range of software such as word processing and import of clip art. They show good skills in using the technology to produce well designed letterheads and business cards. They evaluate their work and understand how to improve it. These pupils have completed their first module of data handling. Higher attainers present their work very well and are competent at more complex searching of two fields in a database. The folders of lower attainers are less well organised and include less work. In Year 10, pupils following the short course module on data handling understand the essentials of databases, how to search a field for specific information and how databases can be used, for example in car dealerships and veterinary practices.
169. Pupils in Year 12 taking ICT in key skills are able to use the knowledge and skills

learned at Key Stage 4 when word processing, creating data bases and desktop publishing. They are meeting the targets set by teachers.

170. Pupils are positive about the subject in all years. They work with interest and enthusiasm, and not only show the ability to work independently, but also show good co-operation by helping each other when working on adjacent computers. They concentrate well. Pupils are well behaved in all lessons; they have good relationships with teachers and with each other. In all lessons there is a good working atmosphere: pupils are well focused on the tasks set by teachers and are able to work with a minimum of teacher intervention.
171. Teaching is good; on occasion it is very good and on occasion excellent. All staff teaching specialist ICT lessons have good subject knowledge; some have very good expertise. Teachers give very clear and detailed explanations that help pupils to learn effectively, particularly in Year 9. There is good use of question and answer sessions, for example, at the start of Year 8 lessons. However, in a Year 10 lesson, too much information was given at the start so that pupils were unable to remember all of it. Lessons are well planned and structured, and relate clearly to the schemes of work. Good worksheets in a Year 10 lesson helped pupils' skills of datacapture in a database assignment. Tasks are well chosen and match pupils' capabilities: higher attainers are given extended tasks, and lower attainers are given specific help by the teacher, for example, in a Year 9 lesson in databases. From Year 7, good use is made of technical language such as *drop down menus*, *cells* in spreadsheets and *justification* and *formatting* of text.
172. Teachers are active in helping pupils on an individual basis. However, opportunities are sometimes missed to use time more efficiently by employing class teaching methods, for example, when Year 8 pupils were developing the use of formulae in a spreadsheet. Tasks are not always closely matched to pupils' attainment levels and group work is not used to support this. Teachers manage pupils well and maintain good behaviour in all lessons. Where teaching is very good, pupils are set clear targets to reach in a short space of time, which encourages good work rates. Excellent teaching is a result of high quality planning and good pace. For example, Year 8 pupils working on spreadsheets are set clear and realistic targets; they are well informed about how to improve the quality of their work and are encouraged to self-assess and improve it.
173. There have been good improvements since the last inspection, particularly in the provision and management of new ICT facilities. However, the weakness in the provision for ICT across all subjects persists. Many subjects do not make effective use of pupils' skills or of the wider availability of computer rooms following the recent expansion of accommodation and increase in the number of more modern computers.
174. There is very good leadership and management of the department, with well-prepared documentation and good assessment schemes. The scheme of work for Key Stage 3 is generally well-considered although the progression in pupils' learning from year to year is not made clear. Teaching is monitored so that good standards are maintained by the large number of staff who teach ICT lessons. The taught ICT course in all years is of considerable benefit in developing pupils' knowledge and skills in the subject. However, pupils are not able to make full use of these skills as they are only able to take a short GCSE course in curriculum time, with no option for a full GCSE course. There are no opportunities for pupils to take higher level courses in the sixth form, although they are able to take a key skills course in ICT.

175. The use of ICT across the curriculum has yet to be fully developed. Departments have been hampered by the lack of resources in terms of the quality of computers as well as the limited number of rooms available in which they are able to teach their subject with ICT. The National Grid for Learning funding has enabled the school to make a significant improvement in the provision of, and access, to computers. However, while some departments have planning in place to make use of the improved accommodation and increased resources for ICT, many departments have yet to put this into practice. In design and technology, there is a significant use of CAD/CAM from Years 7 to 11. This has a positive impact on the standards in this subject. In English and modern languages effective use is made of ICT, particularly in Year 8 in English and in the use of the Internet in Year 11 French. Pupils are able to use their word processing skills to improve the presentation of their work in GCSE,

A-level and GNVQ folders and course work. However, there are too few opportunities in many subjects for pupils to apply the skills they have learned in ICT to increase their knowledge and understanding in these subjects.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

176. GCSE French results in 1999 were well below the national average. Both boys and girls did less well in French than they did in their other subjects; this compared unfavourably with the picture nationally. Girls achieved more highly than boys, but the results of both boys and girls were overall significantly below national averages for grades A* - C. In 2000, the GCSE French results remained much the same. There is no discernible trend over time. In the last four years results have varied widely as has the number of pupils entered for GCSE.
177. The number of students studying A-level French each year is too small to make valid national comparisons. However, most students achieve the school's expectations each year. In 1999, seven of the nine pupils entered gained a graded pass at B - E. In 2000, the results of the five students entered were evenly spread over grades A – N.
178. In 1999, pupils' standards in French as measured by teachers' Year 9 assessments were below those reported nationally. Girls achieved significantly higher levels than boys. In 2000, the assessments show attainment at the standard expected. The proportion of boys achieving the national standard is higher than in 1999; the proportion of girls slightly lower. A very small proportion of pupils achieves the higher levels.

German

179. In 1999, GCSE German results were similar to the national average for points scores and the higher grades A*-C. Pupils did as well in German as they did in their other subjects, reflecting the picture nationally. The number of candidates entered, 23, was relatively small and represented more able pupils; boys and girls did equally well. In 2000, almost twice as many candidates took GCSE German. The results showed a fall.
180. Very few students have opted to study German at A-level in recent years. In 1999, the one student entered gained a B grade. In 2000, the two candidates entered gained A

and C grades, in line with the school's expectations.

181. The pupils who take German at Key Stage 3 study it as a second foreign language. No German results are therefore reported nationally for these pupils.

French and German

182. In the work seen at Key Stage 3, pupils reach the expected standard. Over the three years of the key stage, they develop their ability to listen to French and German spoken by the teacher or on tape. They can identify important details in the materials they hear and in those they read; they give short oral and written responses to material they hear and read. For example, pupils can name parts of the body, say and write which part of the body hurts and how long it has been hurting for. They can ask for temporary remedies. Pupils name a good range of foods and express their likes, dislikes and opinions. They describe themselves and talk about their families in German. They name a range of countries. Pupils can express their personal targets for behaviour and attitudes in German. Pupils with special needs make good progress.
183. In the work seen at Key Stage 4, standards are below those expected. Pupils describe the work they do, say how often they do it, describe themselves and friends, and talk about a town. They explain events using the present and past tenses, but find greater difficulty in being precise about future plans. Pupils recognise common vocabulary within a good range of topic areas, for example, when talking about lost property. They do so when it is presented orally or as reading material but often find it a challenge to recall vocabulary when they wish to use it themselves. Many are not sufficiently attuned to recognise slight but important differences in listening work, for example, between *deux* and *dix*. Recognising details in a sustained piece of oral work is a difficult task for all except the higher attainers.
184. In the sixth form, attainment overall is at the standard expected. Students write grammatically and make good use of appropriate vocabulary. Their detailed knowledge of language is not always adequate to express what they want to say.
185. Pupils' attitudes to learning modern languages are good throughout the school. At Key Stage 3, they show interest in their work and normally settle to work quickly. They enjoy working in pairs and small groups and co-operate well; they learn to work independently and to make individual contributions in lessons. They listen attentively to the teacher's explanations. Pupils enjoy good relationships with each other and with most of the teachers. Their presentation and handwriting are normally good, but written tasks are not always completed. At Key Stage 4, most pupils develop their independence, while following advice from the teachers. Pupils work well in lessons and enjoy them. Behaviour is generally good throughout the school. However, there is a small number of pupils who display more challenging behaviour when the pace of the lesson, and therefore their involvement in it, slackens and the teacher's skills in managing the class are tested. Pupils do not always use their planners effectively for recording homework.
186. Teaching is good across the school; there are examples of very good teaching. The linguistic knowledge and understanding of the teachers are very good. They plan individual lessons effectively and use a range of methods to maintain pupils' interest, for example, quick-fire questioning for recapping on work done earlier and the introduction of a variety of tasks in each lesson. Technological aids to support learning are used: the good lessons incorporated competent use of cassette recorders and an overhead projector. ICT is not yet used fully to support learning in

modern languages, although a lesson was seen during which a class of Year 11 pupils each logged on to a computer and found an Internet site entirely in French. They were able to log on to the M6 web-site and cast their individual votes in fourteen different categories for *Les M6* awards, 2000. This enabled them to increase their ICT skills while at the same time experiencing up-to-the-minute reading and processing skills.

187. Key features of the most successful lessons are a prompt clear start to the lesson and good explanations of grammatical points in English to ensure comprehension, followed by a range of pupil activities that covers the four skills. Success is best assured when the teacher keeps up a good pace and pupils are challenged, but realistically so, by the work. In a Year 9 German lesson, the teacher used the overhead projector together with writing on the white board to revise necessary key vocabulary, giving grammatical explanations in English and providing the information for the lesson. Pupils listened to pre-recorded material in German and then read a letter written in German. They identified the main points and details of texts. A logical sequence to the lesson was a written homework, for which pupils were expected to write a letter in German using the structures and vocabulary encountered in the lesson. There were clear links with the National Literacy Strategy in that the task involved joining sentences and ordering the words correctly. The teacher used direct questioning techniques and had high expectations of what the pupils would achieve. However, across the school teachers' expectations of what pupils can do are not always high, extension and challenging work is not provided for higher attainers and the time available for learning modern languages is not always used to maximum effect. These factors lead to limited long-term progress in learning.
188. The accommodation for modern languages has improved significantly since the last inspection. However, the acoustic in some rooms is poor for listening and speaking work. Although pupils' results in public examinations do not show an improving trend since the last inspection, a number of improvement measures have been taken. Examination entry policy has been reviewed, new schemes of work incorporating some national units for Key Stage 3 are being implemented and course texts are being changed. The foreign language is no longer over-used in the lessons and greater use of grammar is being introduced. Improvements are being made to the good assessment and recording procedures already used by the department. Those aspects of the National Literacy Strategy that staff consider to be good are being adopted. The expectation is that these measures together with other developments will bring greater breadth of experience to the teaching and so lead to pupils' improved standards in assessments and examinations. These other measures are, for example, the *Lingua* link with Sweden, continuing links with initial teacher training courses, increased staff competence in the use of ICT and regular lesson monitoring throughout the year.
189. The school's resources for teaching modern languages are satisfactory. There is a suitable plan to upgrade these resources. There are good opportunities for pupils to visit France and Germany during their time in the school. The department is well led by a committed departmental head and deputy who have planned strategically for the future in order to raise achievement, especially in Years 9 and 11. The effectiveness of the measures taken is reflected by the Year 9 teacher assessments in 2000. The improvements do not yet show in the standards achieved at Key Stage 4 where some weaknesses in teaching also persist.

MUSIC

190. In 1999, the 13 pupils taking GCSE gained grades A*-F, with over half gaining higher grades. At A-level, four pupils were examined in 1999, an increase on previous years. Three gained a pass at grades D and E.
191. At Key Stage 3, the work seen is above the standard expected. Pupils with special needs make good progress. From Year 7, when many pupils show rather undeveloped music skills, pupils make good progress. This shows particularly in listening skills and in pupils' understanding of the music they hear. Their listening covers a wide range of musical styles which pupils analyse and describe well using technical vocabulary. Pupils use electronic and acoustic instruments to compose short pieces of music that combine melodic and rhythmic features effectively. Singing skills are less well developed; their improvement features in the subject development plan. The standard of presentation in exercise books is generally poor.
192. At Key Stage 4, the work seen is of a very high standard. Pupils use electronic instruments with confidence for composing work and to demonstrate their knowledge of musical elements. The use of computers linked to the electronic keyboards for composition and analysis of music is not developed although a high priority in the department development plan.
193. In the sixth form, the work seen is maintained at a very high standard and shows imaginative development in depth and breadth from the work at Key Stage 4. Students use their instrumental and vocal skills well to illustrate theoretical work. They show very good understanding of musical styles and transcription, including works by contemporary composers.
194. Pupils enjoy making music, and they respect and care for the instruments they use. They work well in pairs and groups, showing enthusiasm, sustaining concentration and helping each other. Behaviour is generally very good. The unsatisfactory behaviour in one lesson in Year 9 reflected weaknesses in the teaching. Teachers and pupils enjoy productive relationships so that although, for example, the demand for music as a GCSE option is relatively small, the pupils are keen, punctual and co-operative when attending their twilight sessions.
195. The quality of teaching is very good overall; it is often excellent. Lessons are taught by experienced musicians who show both breadth and depth of knowledge. This enhances pupils' learning of basic musical skills because the musical examples are very well chosen to build on previous learning; they draw on pupils' wider experience of music, for example, of television theme tunes and jingles. In Year 12, this is shown to good effect in stimulating work to create film music using wide-ranging composing techniques and graphics. Sufficient time is allocated for pupils' performances in lessons and for group assessment of performances. Pupils' achievements in performing are celebrated. The dynamic teaching increases the pace of learning and enhances its quality. A team of instrumental teachers provides high quality support for the performance aspects of examination work and for the school orchestra and wind band.
196. Since the previous inspection, improvements have been made to the schemes of work to reflect National Curriculum requirements and assessment criteria more closely. All lessons for Years 10 and 11 continue to be held in the lunch hour and after school. This circumstance results from pupils' decisions but is regretted by the school. The one music lesson a week in Year 9 does not give pupils a strong experience of the subject as a basis for choosing it as a GCSE option.

197. Accommodation for music is excellent for class lessons, instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities. The department is well-equipped with electronic and acoustic instruments which are readily available in all lessons but there is insufficient use of computers at all stages. Good use of ICT is made in the production of worksheets. The department has a literacy policy but its application has yet to be developed; a numeracy policy has not been developed.
198. Music has a high profile in the school's religious and social life. Many pupils are involved in school concerts and the annual musical production held in a local theatre. The department has ambitious plans for the development and extension of its role in school life. There is good participation in lunch-time and after-school clubs which cater for a wide range of musical tastes. Parents give good support for extra-curricular musical activities through providing transport.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

199. In 1999, GCSE results for physical education were below the national average for points scores and significantly below for the higher grades A*-C. The difference between boys' and girls' results was greater than it was nationally. This represented a lowering of standards from the previous year, although previously there had been an improving trend. Results improved again in 2000. Pupils' performance in physical education is similar to their performance in all their other GCSE subjects, as it is nationally for physical education.
200. No A-level examinations were taken in 1999. Five students took A-level physical education or dance in 2000 of whom four achieved pass grades at D or E. The small number of pupils does not allow valid comparison with national standards.
201. In the 1999 teacher assessments in Year 9, results were much the same overall as those reported nationally. This was true for boys' assessments, while those for girls were higher. In 2000, standards were maintained.
202. In the work seen at Key Stage 3, standards meet the national expectation. In boys' invasion games, handling and control are well developed. Lower attainers and pupils with special needs make good progress due to carefully explained and appropriate tasks, and because they are helped to feel an important part of the class. Pupils can explain the effects of exercise on the body and the use of specific muscle groups in exercise, and use this understanding to prepare for and recover from activities safely and effectively. When given the opportunity, as in girls' gymnastics, they can analyse and comment upon the work of others in order to improve performance.
203. At Key Stage 4, work is at the standard expected in both general physical education lessons and in the GCSE course. In general lessons, pupils show good factual knowledge, particularly in relation to techniques and issues relating to health and fitness. Gifted and talented pupils do not always perform to their potential because the tasks set for them are not sufficiently challenging. Pupils following GCSE courses show good practical skills and, in dance, can analyse a partner's performance in detail against criteria and demonstrate possible improvements.
204. The work seen in the A-level course is at the standard expected. Students in physical education can apply the principles of skill acquisition and group theory to the learning of a sport skill. They can analyse and assess each other's performance in some depth.
205. Pupils at both key stages enjoy physical education and value it. However, poor

attendance is shown in some Year 11 classes. Teachers are aware of this as an issue and have strategies in place to overcome it. Pupils concentrate very well on tasks and their levels of activity are high. They work particularly well with a partner and responsibly in small groups. Most show care for others, for example while tackling in rugby. They handle equipment with care.

206. Teaching is good overall and at Key Stage 4; it is very good at Key Stage 3, and satisfactory in the sixth form. All teachers have very good subject knowledge in the practical activity areas and are developing knowledge and confidence in AS/A-level work. Dance teaching is very good. Pupils regard their teachers as experts and enthusiasts and so they listen to and watch them attentively, which aids and speeds their learning. Teachers plan very well and systematically. They are good at sharing the purposes of the lesson with the pupils and reviewing what has been learnt at the end. This ensures that pupils retain and recall well factual information about the subject from lesson to lesson. Relationships with pupils are excellent and this and high expectations contribute to very good behaviour in lessons, although teachers' expectations of the work of gifted and talented pupils are not high enough. Staff are looking carefully at the relationship between academic and motor abilities using the information from pupils' assessment results in English, mathematics and science. They are working to exploit this information more fully in their planning. At Key Stage 4, in general lessons, judgement skills in games are not sufficiently highlighted and taught; as a result, average and lower attainers do not progress sufficiently in a full game. Teachers use questioning well to consolidate learning and to assess pupils' understanding. However, in games activities, the questioning often requires only one-word or short answers; this limits deeper understanding and restricts the development of speaking skills.
207. The department has effectively addressed the issues raised at the last inspection. The improvement is very good. The Key Stage 3 gymnastic unit has been extended and teaching focused on developing quality and variety. This has raised attainment at all levels so that it now meets national expectations. The teaching of health, safety and fitness has been integrated into the activities and pupils are aware of the safety requirements of the activities in which they participate. Standards in GCSE dance and physical education are rising gradually, but low numbers are still inhibiting the achievement of a normal range of grades, particularly at AS/A-level. Pupils make good verbal contributions in lessons when encouraged to do so. Teachers' understanding of the requirements of the National Curriculum is satisfactory. What is to be learned by pupils is clearly identified and communicated to them. Non-participating pupils are involved in lessons by completing an analysis sheet on a participating pupil's work.
208. Leadership and management are good. Staff are experienced and work well as a team. The department is forward-looking, for example in the seeking of sports college status and the appointment of a sports co-ordinator. The staff development policy has been effective in up-dating teachers' practical skills and subject knowledge for A-level work, but has not prepared teachers adequately for the use of ICT in teaching. There are well-structured policies on whole school issues, such as literacy, which contribute to the overall school ethos. Staff observe and evaluate each other's teaching on a regular basis and believe this process to be helping to improve teaching and learning. The revised physical education curriculum is in place. However, there are not detailed schemes of work for all activity areas, nor an assessment strategy that identifies how the new assessment criteria are to be applied. GCSE physical education opportunities for girls now equal those for boys. The music accommodation used for dance teaching does not constitute a suitable environment

for choreographic work because the space is restricted by the furniture and instrumental equipment in the rooms.

VOCATIONAL COURSES

209. The GNVQ results for 1999 were above the national average. Advanced business results were particularly good and well above the national average. Sixty per cent of the students gained distinction and forty per cent obtained merit. The intermediate business results were at the national average with all students gaining a pass grade. Of the candidates entered for advanced health and social care, two gained merit awards and three passed at single award. At intermediate level, one merit and one pass were awarded. Three students with special educational needs obtained a pass grade at foundation level. In advanced leisure and tourism, one student obtained a merit award and three gained a pass level. At intermediate level leisure and tourism, six students gained a pass level. Students taking this course often start from a low attainment base at GCSE; the intermediate work seen was at a basic level. In 1999, students did particularly well in key skills with all Year 12 entries gaining Levels 1, 2 and 3.
210. In 1999, the GCSE business studies results were below the national average for both boys and girls. Results in 2000 were at much the same level. The work seen showed better standards, at least at the level expected.
211. There has been a steady rise in attainment in GNVQ over the past three years. In 2000, the quality of results was sustained and results were very good in business. In Advanced GNVQ Level 3, the average points score has risen from 1.6 in 1998 to 14.5 in 2000. These courses are proving increasingly popular with students, with both boys and girls choosing them and achieving success. The department is responsive to student need in that there is good movement from intermediate into advanced courses at the end of Year 12. The non-completion rate for GNVQ is not high. Students who leave the courses mainly do so to take up employment opportunities. With teacher encouragement, students with special needs produce work of a sufficiently high standard to achieve passes in leisure and tourism and health and social care courses.

212. Students achieve well on all of these courses. They make good progress in acquiring skills, knowledge and understanding of the course content. Students organise their work well. The introduction of a formal key skills course in Year 12 has aided development through a range of interesting assignments. In the written work seen during the inspection, standards were similar to those attained in the most recent public examinations. Good listening skills were observed in all lessons. Students have been very successfully involved in other activities that involve business skills and enhance and develop key skills, for example, *Young Engineers*, work experience and *Young Enterprise*.
213. Standards of work for the GNVQ health and social care course are in line with expectations. Students taking the equal opportunities section of the advanced course show considerable thoroughness in researching the topic of how to handle ethical dilemmas. For example, they co-operated well to present a thought-provoking talk based on the knowledge they have acquired. A group of Year 12 students showed very good oral skills when practising communication skills in a health and social care setting. Very good teaching, involving much interaction and role-play, results in students becoming increasingly confident in making oral presentations and evaluations; they develop good negotiating skills.
214. Higher attainers reach above average standards in their work on the advanced business course. Good action planning results in thorough research, and assignments often include a good degree of self-evaluation. This was evident in the assignment carried out on market research for a fast food take-away. Good levels of literacy support the achievement of above average standards in the work produced at distinction level in business. The key skills of literacy and ICT are well developed in the construction and statistical analysis of questionnaires. The quality of learning for students of all prior attainment is high, encouraged by teaching which gives very good attention to detail. For example, in a lesson on advertising and public relations, students learned the advantages and disadvantages of advertising and were able to produce an advertisement aimed towards a specific market. Average attainers also display good information seeking and handling skills, for example, in the intermediate business course, students devised and produced questionnaires to investigate the human resources aspect of how businesses work. The range and depth of research are not as developed as those seen in the work of the higher attainers. Lower attainers reach a pass standard but their work lacks thoroughness, particularly with regard to planning.
215. In the Year 13 advanced leisure and tourism course, good group work helps students investigate and understand customer protection with regard to terms and conditions of holiday bookings. Students apply knowledge acquired from a talk by the local trading standards officer together with their own research findings to successfully describe and evaluate customer rights. Through good teacher revision and recording of students' responses, a Year 13 advanced group showed that they have a useful knowledge base of health and safety arrangements in relation to outdoor activities and visits.
216. There is not a significant difference in the attainment of boy and girl students, although boys' writing skills are sometimes under-developed and their work difficult to read. ICT is well used by higher attainers, but not seen to any great extent in the work of other students.
217. Students' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are good. They are motivated by the

subject and through good teaching and learning strategies, which include literacy focused work, their personal development, values and self-esteem develop well. They respond well to teachers' questions, sometimes ask their own, and show interest in their work. A few students are rather passive and do not contribute well in lessons. Relationships are very good and mutually supportive. Collaborative work is successful.

218. Teaching overall is good across all course areas. This is similar to the previous inspection finding that teaching was often good and having a positive impact on pupils' attainment. Good teaching is based on a clear understanding of the methods required to promote students' knowledge, understanding and confidence. Detailed planning and clear information from the teacher contribute well in ensuring students' success. Effective support and guidance for students' independent work are strong features of the teaching within leisure and tourism, business, and health and social care. The teaching methods in all areas encourage students to plan their work carefully, to research independently and to organise their work clearly. In the best lessons, students are made well aware of what they are expected to learn as well as what they are expected to do. Good questioning is a strong feature of the health and social care work, for example in a role-play lesson on communication. Time is usually well used, but occasionally students have only a short time in which to apply new knowledge. In the more successful lessons, students' work is helpfully evaluated. Students' work is not always displayed to advantage, particularly in health and social care. In the least successful lessons, knowledge is communicated in rather a muddled way, learning targets for the lesson are not clear, and there is little oral response from the majority of the students. On occasion, unsatisfactory teaching resulted from weaknesses in subject knowledge, the pace of the lesson and planning work at an appropriate level.
219. The leadership and management of these courses are good. There is very good understanding of the various course requirements and good teamwork contributes well to the above average standards being attained. The concerns expressed in the last report concerning opportunities available for ICT have been addressed. The new information technology key skills course is giving students good opportunities to extend their skills and obtain a nationally recognised qualification. Since the last inspection, a new sixth form centre has been built giving students better facilities in which to work and develop their study skills. Recently the number of students choosing to undertake GNVQ has risen greatly, and some of the accommodation is rather small for the numbers concerned. It is to the credit of staff that they work very hard to teach effectively within lesson times and seek continual improvement in student attainment.