

INSPECTION REPORT

**HELENA ROMANES SCHOOL AND SIXTH
FORM CENTRE**

Great Dunmow

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115373

Headteacher: Mr. Stephen Smith

Reporting inspector: Linda Humphreys
7956

Dates of inspection: 26th-30th March 2001

Inspection number: 191558

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Foundation

Age range of pupils: 11-18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Parsonage Downs
Great Dunmow
Essex

Postcode: CM6 2AU

Telephone number: 01371 872560

Fax number: 01371 874632

Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr. Michael Mackman

Date of previous inspection: April 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
7956	Linda Humphreys	<i>Registered inspector</i>		Standards – results and achievements; Teaching; Key Stage 4.
9502	Rosalind Hall	<i>Lay inspector</i>		Standards – attitudes, values and personal development; Care for pupils; Partnership with parents.
22042	Peter Stevens	<i>Team inspector</i>	Special educational needs; Equal opportunities; English as an additional language.	Curricular opportunities; Leadership and management.
27983	Mary Sewell	<i>Team inspector</i>	English.	
8756	Pat Hanage	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics.	Sixth Form.
23246	John Mitchell	<i>Team inspector</i>	Science.	Assessment.
28175	Jackie Goodman	<i>Team inspector</i>	Art.	
8859	Tom Dodd	<i>Team inspector</i>	Design and technology.	
11300	Barry Smith	<i>Team inspector</i>	Geography.	Resources.
18447	Ronald Cohen	<i>Team inspector</i>	History.	
8052	Ken McKenzie	<i>Team inspector</i>	Information and communications technology.	Staffing.
11838	Derek Cronin	<i>Team inspector</i>	Modern foreign languages.	
31660	Marianne Young	<i>Team inspector</i>	Music.	
22042	John Challands	<i>Team inspector</i>	Physical education.	Accommodation.
4372	Ralph Fordham	<i>Team inspector</i>	Religious education.	Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

The inspection contractor was:

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

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The Helena Romanes School and Sixth Form Centre is an 11-18 Foundation comprehensive school, drawing most of its students from a largely rural area including the town of Great Dunmow in North Essex. With over 1300 students, it is bigger than most other secondary schools. There are 674 boys and 715 girls. The number of students on roll, including in the Sixth Form, has grown since the last inspection, and the school is now over-subscribed. The school serves a relatively advantaged area, with a smaller proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals than in most schools. When students enter the school their attainment is broadly in line with national averages. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is about average: 20 per cent of pupils are on the register of special educational needs, and about 1.2 per cent of pupils have statements of special educational needs, which is below average. Nearly all pupils come from United Kingdom heritage backgrounds: very few have English as an additional language. The attendance rate is broadly average. Just as at the time of the last inspection, there has been a significant turnover in the teaching staff of the school in the past year. In common with many schools, particularly those in the South-East of England, the school is finding it hard to recruit and retain well qualified staff. The school's A*-C GCSE results for 1999 and 2000 were awarded a DfEE School Achievement Award.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school achieves good standards, particularly in GCSE examinations. Pupils show enthusiasm for school and most behave well. The quality of teaching is good, despite some staffing problems: most teachers work hard to make sure that pupils have the best education possible in the circumstances. Leadership is good, and some parts of the school's work are well managed, but some others are not as well managed as they should be. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Attainment, particularly the proportion of A*-C grades in GCSE examinations.
- The leadership of the headteacher, governors and key staff.
- Good teaching.
- Pupils' enthusiasm for school.
- Financial planning.
- The provision of extra-curricular activities, particularly sport and study support.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff, in common with many other schools.
- Monitoring and evaluating the school's work.
- The provision for spiritual development.
- Inconsistent expectations and management of the behaviour of a minority of pupils.
- Statutory requirements for RE and collective worship.
- Some reports to parents.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

After the last inspection, the school successfully concentrated its efforts on improving the quality of teaching and learning. GCSE results have improved faster than the national trend, and teaching is significantly better. Provision for pupils with special educational needs has improved. However, little appears to have been done to address any of the other key issues before the appointment of the present headteacher. A new senior management team is now partly in place, line management responsibilities are functioning, and school development is now more strategic. Although the provision of information technology across the curriculum is not significantly better, there is more hardware. Provision for moral development is now good, but there is no better provision for spiritual development. The school is once again experiencing staffing problems, after a period of relative stability between the two inspections.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	A	A	B	D
A Levels/AS Levels	D	C	C	

Key

well above average **A**

above average **B**

average **C**

below average **D**

well below average **E**

GCSE results are above average. The proportion of pupils with 5 or more grades A*-C is well above the national average, but the proportion with 5 or more grades A*-G is close to the average. Pupils' average points score is above average, but below that scored in schools in similar economic circumstances. Over the last 5 years, the trend in the average points is above the national trend, although results in 2000 are slightly lower than in 1999. A Level results are average. The school has met the targets it has set itself for GCSE in the past two

years. Attainment in mathematics and science is particularly good in both Key Stages 3 and 4. Standards in music lessons taught by non-specialists are below what is expected. Pupils achieve well and make good progress in Key Stages 3 and 4, and make sound progress in the Sixth Form.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils are enthusiastic about most aspects of school life.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Most pupils behave well in lessons and around the school, but a few behave badly at times.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are good, and most pupils are responsible, but a few do not consider the effect of their behaviour in lessons on others' learning.
Attendance	Attendance is the same as in most schools.

Pupils enjoy what the school has to offer, and most settle to work well. A minority of pupils are reluctant to learn, sometimes arriving late for lessons and disrupting others' learning. Not all staff insist on high standards of conduct to improve this situation. Relationships are generally good, attendance levels are average.

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.

Teaching is good in English, mathematics and science, as well as in most other subjects. It is at least satisfactory in 89.6 per cent of lessons, and it is good in 50 per cent, very good in 18 per cent, and excellent in 3.8 per cent of lessons. There is little variation between subjects. Teaching is unsatisfactory in 7 per cent of lessons and poor in a further 3.3 per cent, and this was not confined to a few subjects. The main shortcomings are inadequate management of pupils' poor behaviour, and poor planning. This is often, but not exclusively, because of the number of temporary staffing arrangements in place at present. Nevertheless, the high standard of teaching overall enables pupils to achieve well. Literacy and numeracy are taught effectively, and the needs of most pupils are met well in most subjects. Pupils learn particularly well in lessons where a variety of interesting activities, taken at speed, keep them on their toes and eager to do well.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory in both key stages and the Sixth Form.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory, overall. Some arrangements are of high quality, but others are not as good as they should be.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The very small number of these pupils is not always well provided for.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for moral and social development is good. For cultural development it is satisfactory, but very little provision is made for pupils' spiritual development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pupils' personal development is well cared for. Procedures for assessing and supporting pupils' progress are satisfactory.

The school works well with parents in many areas, such as the transfer from primary school. While some information for parents is good, reports are not always adequate. Parents' concerns about behaviour and staffing are justified to some extent. In Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form, statutory requirements for religious education are not met, and pupils do not have enough opportunities to use information technology in Key Stage 4. The pastoral structure is well led and organised, but the arrangements to monitor pupils' progress in comparison with national standards are not as well developed. The school does not provide consistently well for all pupils with special educational needs, including the few pupils who speak English as an additional language and those with particular gifts and talents.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Leadership is good. Some parts of the school's work are well managed, but some other parts are not as well managed as they should be.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are well informed about the school's work and fulfil their responsibilities well.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school does not evaluate its performance adequately, although what needs to be improved is already included in plans for the future.
The strategic use of resources	School development is well supported by careful financial management and use of resources.

Accommodation and resources are satisfactory, but, in common with many schools, the school finds it hard to recruit and retain staff, and there is a number of long-term absences due to sickness. The leadership of the headteacher, governors and key staff is good. Some of the school's work is not well managed, principally the consistency of what teachers expect of pupils' conduct and the way the work of the school is evaluated. Several good means for evaluation have recently been put into place. The principles of best value are well applied.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are expected to work hard and do their best. • Their children like school and make good progress. • The school is approachable. • Children are helped to become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviour. • Homework. • The way the school works with parents and keeps them informed. • The way the school is led and managed. • The high turnover of teachers.

The inspection findings bear out what parents like about the school. Pupils are expected to do their best; they make good progress and attain good results in GCSE examinations. The majority of pupils are responsible, and are keen to make the most of what the school provides. The procedures for contacting the school are good. However, a small proportion of pupils do behave badly, and this is not always well handled. The quality and regularity of homework does vary. Some information is of good quality, but reports to parents are not satisfactory: the system of progress checks every five or six weeks has been halted by computer failure, and annual reports do not contain all necessary information. Parents' concerns about the management of the school are justified in so far as some of the school's work is not well managed, but the headteacher, governors and senior staff provide good leadership. Parents are also justifiably concerned about staffing problems, but this school is not alone in experiencing the difficulties caused by the shortage of available teachers.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. When pupils enter the school, their attainment is broadly average. Results in national tests at the end of the primary school years consistently show that the intake contains fewer very high attainers than might be expected.
2. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is also broadly average in English and most other subjects, but attainment in mathematics and science is well above average. Results in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2000 are above the national average in English, and well above the national average in mathematics and science. In comparison with schools in similar economic circumstances, the percentage of pupils who achieve the expected level is above average in mathematics and science but below average in English. However, the percentage of pupils who achieve higher grades is in line with the average in English, above average in science, and well above average in mathematics. When the average points scored by pupils is considered, results in English are close to the national average but below those in similar schools. Results in science are well above the national average and above the average in similar schools, and in mathematics, results are well above both the average scored nationally and the average in similar schools. Over the last four years, the trend in the school's results is broadly in line with the national trend. In all three subjects in 2000, boys' results are significantly lower than those of girls, in relation to the national averages for each group. Results in teacher assessments in other subjects at the end of Key Stage 3 are above average in geography, history and information and communications technology (ICT) and well above average in design and technology. Results in modern foreign languages, where attainment is below the national average, with particularly low results for boys, are much lower than in previous years. Lack of opportunities to moderate these results with other schools calls into question their reliability. In music, pupils' attainment is affected by the staffing arrangements. Pupils taught by specialist teachers attain in line with what is expected, but the attainment of those pupils whose lessons are taught by teachers providing cover and by temporary teachers is much lower.
3. Pupils' achievement in most subjects, including English, is satisfactory, and pupils achieve well in mathematics and science. There are very few pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds. The school does not monitor their progress, but there is no inspection evidence to suggest that they make significantly different progress from that made by other pupils.
4. In 2000, results in GCSE examinations are close to the average for the proportions of pupils scoring five or more grades A*-G and one or more grades A*-G, but they are well above the national average for the percentage of pupils scoring five or more grades A*-C, and the school has won a DfEE School Achievement Award for its GCSE results in 1999 and 2000. The proportion of five or more A*-C grades is above that scored in schools in similar economic circumstances. It is also above that which is scored in schools where pupils had results in Key Stage 3 tests in 1998 which are similar to those scored by this school's pupils. The proportions gaining the lower grades do not compare well in either of these categories. The school believes this is because the number of

pupils who serve to affect these comparisons is small, and a few pupils, often those with a poor record of attendance in Year 11, do not attend for GCSE examinations.

5. The average points scored by pupils is above the national average: boys' score is above average for boys, whereas girls' score is well above the average for girls. However, the average points score is well below both the average scored in schools in similar circumstances, and that which is scored in schools with similar Key Stage 3 results in 1998. Nevertheless, the trend in the school's results is good: over the past five years, the improving trend in average points scored is above the national trend. Results in 2000, however, are lower than those achieved in 1999.

6. In 1996 and 1997, boys' results exceeded the national average for boys by a greater margin than girls' results exceeded the average for girls. However, since 1998, this trend has been reversed, and girls are doing increasingly better than boys. In 2000, 120 boys were entered, compared with 99 girls, which has been of significance in the results achieved.

7. In GCSE examinations, standards are consistently high across most subjects. The proportion of A*-C grades is above the national average in most subjects, with the exception of economics, single award science, and Spanish. There are significant variations between subjects in the points scored per pupil, and girls outperform boys in most subjects, except geography, history, science, physical education, and some design and technology options. There appears to be no stable trend in modern foreign languages, where results in French and Spanish fluctuate from year to year.

8. In some subjects, standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are similar to the results achieved last year. Standards in art, geography, history and physical education are above average. Standards in mathematics and science are well above average. Standards are broadly average in English, modern foreign languages and music. In these subjects there are, or have been earlier in the year, difficulties in ensuring continuous good quality teaching. Standards in information technology are below average, because pupils do not have enough opportunities to use ICT and make progress. Pupils following the GCSE course in religious education attain average levels, but the majority of pupils have no religious education lessons. Pupils make good progress in most subjects in Key Stage 4, thanks to good teaching and careful preparation for examinations, but staffing problems in English, modern foreign languages, and music mean that pupils' progress is just satisfactory. The limited chances pupils have to develop skills in information technology leads to unsatisfactory progress over Key Stage 4. In Key Stage 4, only pupils following the GCSE course have religious education. These pupils make satisfactory progress and attain average standards, but the majority of pupils are unable to make any progress.

9. Standards in the Sixth Form are in line with national averages in most subjects and courses. Attainment is above average in English, mathematics, geography and physical education. In 2000, the average points scored by pupils in A Level examinations was below, but close to, the national average. This score has remained close to the national average over the past three years. In 2000, there was variation between subjects in the proportion of higher grades scored. The proportion was high in business studies and mathematics, but low in

biology, drama and textiles. The average points score of the eight candidates who took Advanced GNVQ awards is above the national average. Sixth Form students generally make satisfactory progress, and make good progress in mathematics, modern foreign languages and physical education.

10. In 1999 the school set a target of 63 per cent of pupils to gain five or more A*-C grades in GCSE examinations, when 59 per cent of pupils had achieved this in the previous year. The same figure was retained for the target for 2000, having regard for the prior attainment of this cohort, and it was again met. The school sets the target of reaching 100 per cent pass grades, which it is still striving to achieve.

11. There is a whole school policy for literacy and a coordinator has recently been appointed, but the policy is not yet fully implemented. However, pupils are given many opportunities in most subjects to communicate orally, and standards of speaking and listening are generally satisfactory. Pupils use technical language appropriately. Standards of reading are satisfactory, and pupils confidently explore a variety of texts. Pupils read with a high level of understanding, both literal and inferential. They are able to select, retrieve and edit information. The best examples of this were in history and geography.

12. Standards in writing are satisfactory, and they are good in the Sixth Form. Some subject areas, including art, English, mathematics and science, display technical vocabulary to assist pupils' spelling. Pupils of all ages write in a variety of styles. Good examples were observed in religious education, where pupils wrote letters and diaries, as well as reports. Pupils are encouraged to write analytically and evaluatively in drama. The best examples of sustained pieces of writing are in English and history. Work is well presented, especially in coursework. Pupils obviously take a pride in their work, and take time to word process pieces at home in order to improve presentation.

13. There is a whole school numeracy policy, currently in draft form. Pupils' techniques are good, as a result of good mathematics teaching, and these skills help them to make progress in other subjects. They can use a calculator correctly and can use mental arithmetic methods accurately to answer questions. However, some pupils are slow in doing so and need much more practice to improve their speed. In science, most pupils can confidently handle number at a level which at least matches their attainment in science. For example, high attainers in Key Stage 4 show good use of algebra in handling wave equations. In geography, pupils use their data handling skills in project work, using traffic survey data in urban areas, for example. Pupils following courses in geography in Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form can use techniques for rank correlation.

14. In Key Stage 3, where pupils have discrete lessons in information and communications technology, their skills match what is expected nationally. There is no timetabled information technology in Key Stage 4, and only limited opportunities to use these skills are planned in subjects. The result is that pupils' skills are not developed further, and standards are below average at the end of Key Stage 4. Sixth Form students reach average standards, as many use information technology autonomously, particularly word processing and the resources of the Internet.

15. Overall, pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in both Key Stages. There is evidence of many pupils making good progress in respect of their prior attainment, and moving up National Curriculum levels. There is a significant number who make less progress in relation to these levels. The information provided by subjects about the progress pupils make is often not detailed enough to trace progress securely. The school does not identify gifted and talented pupils, and their progress is not tracked, though a few subjects do make provision for able pupils. Inspection evidence indicates that able pupils make good progress in most subjects. The school does not identify adequately the needs of pupils with English as an additional language. There are very few of these pupils in the school, and very few of these are at early stages of learning English. Their progress in acquiring literacy skills in English, and more generally, is not adequately monitored.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

16. Pupils show enthusiasm for school. They speak keenly about many aspects of their school life, and, in particular, about the extra-curricular activities provided. Most settle to work at once in the classroom, but some lack a sense of urgency as they move from class to class, and arrive late for some lessons. This is not always challenged effectively by teachers.

17. Standards of behaviour are satisfactory. In the majority of lessons pupils behave well, in response to good teaching and to high expectations of their attitudes and work rate. However, in some lessons where the teaching is lacking in pace or challenge, or the teacher's strategies for managing behaviour are weak, pupils become restless and lose concentration. In all year groups there are some pupils, often boys, whose behaviour is particularly challenging. The majority of staff handle these pupils well and minimise the disruption they seek to cause, but a few teachers find it hard to control the misbehaviour and lack of respect.

18. As pupils walk round the school between lessons and at break times there is some jostling in the narrow corridors, but this is not generally threatening or dangerous. A few instances of foul language and insensitivity between pupils were seen. Many of these go unchecked, partly because there are few staff on duty in corridors at these times, and also because not all staff share consistently high expectations of pupils' conduct or dress. No incidents of bullying or racism were seen during the inspection. Parents and pupils believe that any such incidents are dealt with quickly and fairly. Aggressive behaviour is also dealt with firmly. Exclusions are appropriate and systematic, and detailed records are kept. There have been no permanent exclusions in the past year.

19. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff are generally good. Most pupils of different ages and sexes get on well around the school and as they wait for buses at the end of the day. In some departments relationships are very good, with highs of respect shown between pupils and staff. Physical education is a particularly good example of this. Constructive relationships are also evident in most Sixth Form lessons.

20. Pupils take on a range of responsibilities around the school, such as working on the front reception desk and acting as guides at open evenings or open days. The year councils and school

council have been fully involved in arranging successful fundraising activities, for example the recent Red Nose Day. In some lessons, notably in history and geography, pupils

enjoy the opportunities offered to them to use their initiative, and produce good investigative work, though such opportunities are not developed fully in every subject. However, some pupils could develop a greater understanding of how their actions affect others, such as the effects of poor behaviour in classrooms.

21. Levels of attendance are in line with the national average. Nearly all pupils arrive punctually, but there are occasions during the year when a greater number are late because of problems with the punctuality of a school bus service organised by parents.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

22. The quality of teaching is good. It was judged to be at least satisfactory in 89.7 per cent of lessons, of which 50 per cent were good, 18 per cent very good, and nearly 4 per cent excellent. Teaching was judged unsatisfactory in seven per cent of lessons and poor in a further 3 per cent. Inadequate teaching was observed in a number of subjects.

23. Teachers who gave an unsatisfactory or poor lesson are, in the main, relatively new to the school. In some cases they are temporary or part-time teachers, or teachers covering for absent colleagues in lessons outside their own expertise. However, there were other temporary or relatively new teachers who taught well. Three of the excellent lessons, indeed, were taught by teachers who joined the school this school year or last. The main shortcomings of the unsatisfactory and poor teaching are inadequate management of pupils' poor behaviour, and poor planning for the lesson. Some teachers find it hard to control the very challenging behaviour of some pupils, often boys, particularly when they do not know the pupils well. In some cases planning does not set a high enough challenge, with the result that pupils become frustrated and bored and their behaviour often deteriorates. Sometimes the teacher's input is inadequate, with poor explanations which do not help pupils to understand, or inadequate specialist knowledge to support pupils' learning. In some lessons time is not well used and the pace of work is too slow, which again leads to concentration wandering.

24. However, the majority of teaching, nearly 72 per cent, is at least good, with a significant proportion of very good teaching, and examples of excellent practice.

25. There are a number of features which characterise the high quality of teaching. Although some teachers do find it difficult to control poor behaviour, the majority are skilled at managing pupils. This is achieved in a large number of lessons through very careful preparation and planning of a large number of activities for the lesson. These are sustained at a very brisk pace, with pupils moving from task to task so that they have no chance to drift. As a result, pupils are keen to try hard and they work at a good pace. The variety of activities and their challenging nature are both significant features. These lessons set high expectations of pupils' involvement, which results in high levels of response in both behaviour and work.

26. Pupils are also managed well through the good relationships which most teachers have established with them, and touches of humour are used judiciously. The introduction of competitive

elements in some lessons generates challenge and spurs pupils on to try their best. Teachers' enthusiasm also inspires pupils to learn: this is particularly evident in physical education.

27. Most teachers have good knowledge of their subjects. In mathematics, for example, explanations are clear, and good examples are chosen to illustrate mathematical concepts. In an excellent swimming lesson, the teacher's knowledge was evident in the very skilled use of questions. Well focused interventions, both to the whole class and to individuals, led to pupils developing skills very well in the lesson.

28. Planning is good. Lessons are well prepared, and technical support staff play an important role in this. The clarity of what is to be achieved in the lesson is often a real support to learning, as pupils are regularly reminded of where the lesson is going, and how well they are progressing towards that aim. For the most part, teachers plan well to meet the needs of the range of pupils in classes. For example, in a science lesson about the structure of DNA in Year 11, the lesson was planned to take pupils through a range of related activities which built on their prior learning to good effect. In many subjects, pupils with special educational needs are enabled to make progress through careful provision of suitable activities. For example, in a history lesson on the feudal system, the teacher took careful account of the needs expressed in pupils' individual education plans. These were catered for within the range of activities designed to ensure that all pupils in this mixed ability group made good progress. However, this is not universally well done. Learning assistants make a significant positive contribution in helping pupils with special educational needs to learn. In some subjects, however, such as modern foreign languages, higher attaining pupils are not so well catered for.

29. Since the last inspection, pupils are given more widespread opportunities to take responsibility in learning. For example, they have opportunities to work in groups and to make presentations to their peers. They are encouraged in some subjects to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in their own work, and that of others, which helps them to reflect on what they are learning and how they are progressing. The discussion which ensues is often a powerful tool in extending knowledge and understanding. A good example of this was a football lesson with Year 8 pupils, who developed their evaluation skills very well.

30. In many subjects homework is an integral part of learning, and homework tasks continue and extend class work. Sometimes, however, and often when a class is not taught by a regular or permanent teacher, the tasks set are trivial, or no homework is set at all. The brisk pace which characterises many lessons is significant in the rapid progress made. In some cases, the use of resources also contributes. For example, in an A Level geography lessons, the whiteboard was used very effectively to build up a record of the contributions made by the class. Photographs were also displayed as part of this careful strategy to help students build up information for case studies.

31. Many teachers teach more lessons than is usual, in the school's efforts to reduce the effect of its staffing difficulties on pupils' learning. The high quality of the teaching observed in such adverse circumstances pays tribute to the hard work and dedication of the staff of the school.

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

32. The quality and range of opportunities for learning are satisfactory across both key stages. The curriculum in Key Stage 3 includes all National Curriculum subjects, religious education, and a period each week of personal and social education. It includes discrete provision for information technology throughout Years 7 to 9. This equips pupils well to use computers as routine tools across a wide range of subject areas. Whilst the curriculum is generally well balanced and broadly based, there are imbalances in terms of the allocation of time to some subject areas. When the school was last inspected, the time allowed for history and geography was below average and that for science was above average. These time allocations remain the same.

33. Pupils are placed in mixed ability forms on entry into the school and these groups are used for teaching all subjects in Year 7. In Years 8 and 9 setting is introduced in mathematics and science. The last inspection found that pupils were allocated to sets in all subjects on their attainment in humanities. This is no longer the case, and the range of needs in mixed ability sets is well provided for in most subjects, with the exception of modern foreign languages, where little account is taken of individual needs as all pupils tend to do the same work. Strategies for developing literacy skills are satisfactory, and include carefully targeted work with pupils with special educational needs, an emphasis on technical language in science and technology, and the use of writing frames to help structure written work. Strategies for developing numeracy skills are good, thanks to good teaching in mathematics lessons, and to opportunities to use skills in a number of contexts in other subjects.

34. Schemes of work are generally satisfactory, and are very good in history and geography. There are no schemes of work in music.

35. The curriculum in Key Stage 4 is not sufficiently broad. There is no provision for teaching religious education, apart from the GCSE course option. Whilst statutory requirements are met in ICT, only those pupils on vocational courses are taught the subject as a key skill. No discrete provision is made for information technology at Key Stage 4 and therefore pupils must rely on the provision made within subject areas. This varies in quality both within and between departments. Departments find it hard to get enough access to computers, and staff need further training, which is scheduled for the summer term of the current school year.

36. In Year 9 there is well structured preparation for options, and opportunities for consultations. These help to ensure that pupils are equipped to choose courses in Key Stage 4 which match their needs and interests. All pupils study English, both language and literature, and mathematics, physical education, and personal and social education, which includes careers. Pupils can take triple, double or single award courses in science. Pupils are able to take two modern languages, although none currently studies two languages in Year 11. A small number of pupils study no modern foreign language, but follow courses in basic skills, accredited through Youth Award and Initial Award schemes, more suited to their needs. Other options include other National Curriculum subjects, as well as drama, economics, business studies and statistics. One GNVQ course is available in Leisure and Tourism, at both Foundation and Intermediate levels. All pupils undertake two weeks' work experience in Year 10.

37. The curriculum in both key stages is broadened by a structured personal and social education programme. This includes occasional one-day conferences to increase understanding and raise awareness of issues such as racism, sex education and drugs misuse. Since the last inspection much effort has been directed towards developing a more coherent programme which ensures that units of work are sequenced more appropriately as pupils progress through the school. The programme is taught by form tutors, but no lessons could be observed during the inspection because they were timetabled outside the inspection observation schedule. There is not enough time for directors of student studies to review the design of the programme, nor to monitor how consistently it is taught by the tutors. This time constraint is, of course, exacerbated by the school's current staffing problems. The input provided by the local careers service has been reduced in recent years, but the quality of the careers programme developed by the school is good. It covers a 16 week period and includes various careers events, industry days, opportunities for extended work experience, and the development of a range of skills associated with the world of work.

38. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. They receive their full curricular entitlement and are fully integrated into all aspects of school life. All staff understand the school's staged approach to special educational needs. Arrangements for implementing the provision identified on pupils' statements are good. There is evidence in schemes of work that some progress has been made since the last inspection in identifying strategies to respond to pupils' individual needs. However, these strategies are not consistently identified in teachers' day-to-day planning and practice. There is no whole-school policy on identifying gifted and talented pupils. Whilst there is evidence of good practice in providing for the needs of very able pupils in mathematics, science and physical education, provision in other subjects is patchy. Similarly, arrangements to identify and respond to the needs of those pupils for whom English is an additional language are not yet sufficiently developed and are practised inconsistently.

39. The curriculum is considerably enhanced by the extensive and varied range of extra-curricular activities available. Many teachers give most generously of their time to organise clubs and activities linked to curriculum subjects, leisure pursuits, visits, team games and outdoor activities. They do this even when they are often teaching much fuller timetables than is normally the case to make up for shortfalls in staffing. In physical education these opportunities are outstanding, and the impact on the standards pupils achieve is reflected in the very good results in fixtures, and the number of pupils achieving representative honours. Participation rates across the range of activities are high.

40. The Sixth Form curriculum is broad, with a wide choice of Advanced or Advanced Subsidiary levels (A/AS Levels), including subjects such as economics, law, media studies and psychology. There is also a number of Advanced GNVQ or Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education (AVCE) courses in business studies, leisure and recreation, and travel and tourism. In addition, GCSE courses in drama, astronomy, English and mathematics are available. However, there is no provision for religious education in Years 12 and 13, and the school does not meet statutory requirements in this respect. Although there is no key skills programme in place this year, plans are in place to introduce one in September 2001.

41. The school makes very little provision for pupils' spiritual development. Religious education is only taught to all pupils in Key Stage 3; in Key Stage 4, a GCSE course is available as an option, but the school does not ensure religious education lessons for all pupils either in this Key Stage or in

the Sixth Form. The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship, although assemblies are held each day for different groups of pupils. The religious education course in Years 7 to 9 does give pupils opportunities to respond to religious beliefs and experiences. However, in all other areas of its life and work, the school does not consider the need to provide for pupils' spiritual growth, and opportunities inherent in various activities, such as art, English and music, are squandered. This was a Key Issue when the school was last inspected and no progress has been made.

42. In contrast, the school makes good provision for moral and social development. The Key Stage 3 religious education course allows pupils to consider and discuss moral and social issues. These are also included in the personal and social education course, and in the occasional one day conferences on themes such as the Holocaust. Many staff provide good role models for pupils, though the inconsistent attitudes to appropriate standards of conduct do not help to set a good example. The curriculum of many subjects includes opportunities to consider moral and social issues, such as work in modern foreign languages on the environment, bullfighting and drug abuse, and debates in English on topics such as fox hunting. Pupils are given many opportunities to work in groups and develop collaborative and cooperative working. The school organises many trips and visits, a number of which are residential, including trips abroad. The Year councils and the School Council provide opportunities for pupils to represent their peers and take on responsibility. Sixth Form students also serve on a local Youth Parliament. There is a thriving Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. Pupils are also involved in fund-raising efforts. A feature of some of the teaching is the use of competitive activities to stimulate pupils' interest. Pupils invariably respond very well to the spirit of competition. Assemblies are used to celebrate achievements and skills gained outside school. During the inspection, some outstanding achievements by Year 7 pupils were used to illustrate that all of us have our strengths as well as our less strong areas, and pupils showed admiration for and pleasure in their friends' success.

43. Provision for pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. The strong contribution made formerly by music is currently reduced because of staffing problems. All the same, despite these difficulties the school mounted a successful production this term, as well as an Advent tidings concert with three primary schools last Christmas, and ensembles rehearse regularly.

44. Pupils visit theatres and art galleries. They develop awareness of European cultures through learning French and Spanish, through contact with native speakers on the staff, and through visits and exchanges organized by the modern foreign languages, history and geography departments. Pupils have opportunities to study the cultures of other countries in art and geography, but little emphasis is given to enabling pupils to appreciate the multicultural nature of large parts of the United Kingdom.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

45. Since the previous inspection, the role of the directors of student studies (DSS), which had just been created, has become central to the pastoral support of pupils. Tutors and DSS have a good overview of academic and personal development, and pupils giving concern in either area are quickly identified and cared for. The tutor system has been maintained well throughout the changes in staff and the shortage that has occurred, though inevitably this has placed more of a burden on the DSS to maintain some continuity. The DSS are supported well by an administrative assistant who ensures that parents are kept fully informed, and that internal communication is smooth running. The high quality of this communication about pupils is a strong feature. Pupils, particularly those in the lower year groups, appreciate the merit system and value the rewards of certificates.

46. The school has a well-established mentoring programme to support a significant number of Year 11 pupils. This involves mentors from the support staff, in addition to teaching staff. The beneficial effects of this programme can be seen in the school's improved GCSE results.

47. Registration procedures are thorough and are carried out well throughout the school. Pupils are tracked carefully and are rewarded regularly for good attendance. Pupils whose attendance gives concern are picked up quickly and the school involves the educational welfare officer where appropriate. Checks are made on these pupils throughout the day. Lateness is also monitored.

48. Tutor time is used for registration, absence reports and the signing of planners. The way this time is used varies; some tutors fill the time with useful supportive activities while others do little beyond taking the register. Most tutors have established good relationships with their tutor groups, but many do not insist on high enough standards of behaviour or dress during tutor time at the start of the day. Similarly, in lessons and around the school, staff do not all insist that pupils' conduct and dress is of a high standard. The new behaviour policy is clear but it is not implemented consistently by all staff, and staff do not all insist on high standards as pupils move around the school.

49. The school has good systems for dealing with poor behaviour. Incidents are recorded in detail, and the school has put in place programmes, such as report card systems, to encourage better behaviour or attendance in those pupils who give concern. The school has worked hard in the last year to put together individual study programmes for pupils. For example, a growing number of pupils are involved in extended work experience, which has encouraged them to attend school more regularly and positively. Incidents of poor behaviour are not always well handled by individual staff, however, and the structures to support teachers in this task are not implemented consistently in all areas.

50. Parents and pupils state that incidents of bullying are dealt with effectively and quickly. The school has adopted a 'no blame' approach, and full records of incidents of bullying and racism are kept. A larger number of fixed term exclusions has been recorded than when the school was last inspected. These exclusions are for appropriate reasons, and records are detailed and systematic.

51. The school has satisfactory procedures for assessing the attainment of pupils. Each faculty is responsible for producing, using and developing its own arrangements for assessment, in line with school policy. The present school policy lacks detail and puts too much responsibility on to

individual subject areas, with the result that the quality of faculty policies is not uniformly high. Links exist between heads of faculty and senior management, but there are no formal procedures for monitoring the effectiveness of procedures. The assessment policy is currently under review.

52. Assessment is good in art, design and technology, history, mathematics, modern foreign languages, and science. In modern languages, pupils are assessed each half-term and results converted to National Curriculum levels and collated by attainment targets. In mathematics, the policy contains clear guidance for staff on departmental processes such as regular testing and the use of departmental examinations. Assessment in geography is good in Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form. However, there is no evidence of any continuous assessment in music, and the systems for assessment in English are not standardised across year groups.

53. There is significant variation in the quality of marking of pupils' work both within and between faculties, but many examples of good practice exist. Where marking is good, such as in modern foreign languages, pupils know how the standard of their work relates to National Curriculum levels. In mathematics, pupils are effectively involved in assessment of their own work at the end of each module and, in art there is a good deal of useful discussion and informal feedback after each project has been marked. Some teachers mark much more effectively than others, and although senior management do carry out some checks on the marking of books, this is not done thoroughly or consistently. Problems with staffing have made it difficult to maintain a rigorous policy throughout the school. In all subject areas, even where marking is thorough, little help is given to pupils on how to improve their work, and comments are restricted to praise or criticism without guidance for future action.

54. The school has a half-termly progress check to monitor the progress pupils make. This gives pupils some information about their performance in all subjects in relation to their peers, but it does not allow them to compare their attainment with national expectations. In Key Stage 4, pupils are set a global target for overall performance in GCSE examinations, on the basis of attainment in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 and the results of cognitive ability testing. Target setting in individual subjects is not well developed, but there is good practice in some faculties. Target grades are set for groups of pupils in mathematics; in science and art, prior attainment data is used to set targets for individuals. Available information about national standards of attainment is not widely used to measure pupils' progress through the school, but proposals exist in the school improvement plan to use such data for target setting in the future.

55. The use of assessment to inform curriculum development is not uniformly well developed. Most faculties analyse their examination results, but the information so obtained is not always well used, although some good practice exists. For example, in geography and art, schemes of work are regularly reviewed in the light of progress checks. In science, test and examination results are employed to form pupil groupings and, where appropriate, the movement of pupils between groups. Senior management does not monitor on a routine basis what faculties do to adjust study programmes.

56. Procedures for identifying pupils with special educational needs are thorough, and they are put into practice consistently and effectively. There are comprehensive arrangements for reviewing the progress of pupils at Stages 1, 3 and 5 of the Code of Practice for special educational needs.

However, there are no similar arrangements for pupils at Stage 2. The contribution which subjects make to the reviews of pupils at Stages 3 to 5, in terms of the range and quality of the information which they provide, is unsatisfactory.

57. The arrangements to identify able and gifted pupils are not yet adequately developed in all subjects. There is evidence of good practice in providing for their needs in mathematics, science and physical education, but not elsewhere. The school has no systematic approach to identify the needs of the very small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language. The school does not monitor their attainment and progress, and provision depends on what individual teachers do, rather than on a central coherent system.

58. The school nurse plays a central and effective role in ensuring pupils' well-being. The well-stocked medical room is at the heart of the building and the nurse is very accessible to pupils, who regularly seek her advice and support. Appropriate records are kept of all medical referrals. Child protection procedures are in place, including staff training, and records are kept.

59. The school has a full health and safety policy. The local education authority carries out regular inspections, and school staff undertake site checks. A committee meets regularly and minutes are presented to governors. Risk assessments have been carried out. Despite these procedures, a number of health and safety concerns raised by the inspection team were conveyed to the school.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

60. Parents are generally supportive of the school, but levels of parental concern have increased since the previous inspection. Most parents feel that the school expects their children to work hard and achieve their best, and believe that their children like school and are making good progress. They would feel comfortable in approaching the school, and believe that the school is helping children become mature and responsible. The findings of the inspection support parents' positive views.

61. However, a significant proportion of parents expressed concerns through the questionnaire, the parents' meeting and in letters. Parents are concerned about behaviour, homework, and the way the school works with parents and keeps them informed. Parents are particularly anxious about the leadership and management of the school and the problems caused by the turnover in teaching staff and the difficulties in recruiting well qualified teachers.

62. A small proportion of pupils do behave badly, most often in lessons. This is not always well handled by teachers, sometimes, but not exclusively, by those who are new to the school, and often working on a temporary and short-term basis. Staff do not adopt a uniformly rigorous approach to insisting on high standards of conduct and dress. The quality and regularity of homework does vary.

63. The school runs a successful induction programme for new parents and pupils, and this starts in Year 5 in the primary schools. Parents are also involved well in meetings in Year 9 to discuss options for study in Key Stage 4, and in Year 11, where revision techniques are highlighted. The information provided by the school in the form of the prospectus, the annual report to parents and the newsletters is of good quality and readable. A system was introduced to issue grades indicating the progress pupils make, but it has not been carried through in the current year because a new computer system has proved faulty. In addition, the annual reports on pupils' attainment and progress, although valued by parents for the information they give, do not all include all the necessary information. Parents' attendance at parents' consultation evenings and 'tutor surgeries' is high. However, again because of the school's staffing problems, subject teachers have sometimes not been available to all parents for consultation, and alternative arrangements have been offered. Most parents appreciate the links they have with tutors through the school planner, and the way in which the school deals with individual concerns or queries quickly and effectively.

64. The headteacher, governors and senior staff provide good leadership, but there are some aspects of the school's work which are not well managed, as well as some which are managed effectively. Statutory requirements are not met for religious education and a daily act of worship, the work of the school is not monitored and evaluated as well as it should be, and some reports are not adequate. Parents are justifiably concerned about the problems caused by the difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff. These have an adverse effect on many areas of the school's work. Nevertheless, this school is not alone in experiencing the difficulties caused by the shortage of available teachers, particularly in this area of England.

65. The impact of parents' involvement on the work of the school is satisfactory. Parents were involved in drawing up the Code of Conduct, and the home-school agreement. They support the school through an active Parent-Teacher Association which organises fundraising and social events, such as quiz nights and discos. The majority of parents are supportive of their children's learning by ensuring that they attend school regularly and complete their homework.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

66. The headteacher has been in post less than two years and a significant number of senior managers are also relatively new in post. The headteacher is building a newly structured senior team, which is not yet completely in place. The leadership of the headteacher, governors and senior staff is good.

67. The school has clear aims which are expressed in the mission statement and are reflected in the daily life of the school and in development priorities. The aims are appropriate to the needs of the pupils and, to a large extent, are achieved successfully.

68. The governing body has a good understanding of its roles and responsibilities, and works well with the headteacher in fulfilling these to a high degree. Governors have a very good grasp of the school's main priorities, and, together with the senior management team, have identified strategies to achieve them. The governors provide strong support to the headteacher and staff, and are fully involved in the work of the school, through links with all faculties, the school council and the pastoral areas. They are kept well informed through the headteacher's termly report and through an appropriate programme of meetings. However, they do not meet all their statutory duties.

69. The headteacher has a clear vision for the work of the school, which is shared by the governing body, the senior management team and most staff, and is articulated in the school's aims and core values. His leadership is consultative, but firm and decisive. He is well supported by the leadership exercised by senior managers and that of other staff with responsibility in the school. With this inspiration, staff are working exceptionally hard to make up for the difficulties caused by the staffing shortages and to minimise the effects on pupils' experience of education. Staff at all levels share a commitment to providing the best quality of education possible to enable pupils to reach high standards.

70. A clear and well considered management structure is now in place. Senior staff have line management responsibilities which they fulfil conscientiously. Detailed and comprehensive policy statements are now in place in all major aspects of the school's work. The quality of leadership and management within faculties is good. There is no head of department at present in music, and the teacher in charge is working valiantly to keep the department running in very difficult circumstances. Some middle managers and senior staff play an important role in the schools' work in initial teacher training within a local consortium: the English and science departments take a lead role in training in these subjects.

71. The pastoral system is very effective. Directors of student studies make a very strong contribution to pupils' academic progress and to their wellbeing. The pastoral and academic roles of tutors are linked well, and there are good arrangements for monitoring pupils' academic and personal development. Good progress has been made since the last inspection in developing the provision for pupils with special educational needs. In the short time since her appointment, the coordinator for special educational needs has continued to improve the quality of provision. A detailed audit has been undertaken of the department's development, and appropriate targets have been identified for the future. However, the school does not identify and provide adequately for gifted and talented pupils or for all pupils with English as an additional language.

72. There are some shortcomings in the way in which the school is managed. Arrangements for monitoring and evaluating the work of the school are unsatisfactory and have been identified by the school as a priority in the current development plan. The school is a member of a local consortium for school improvement, through which work on improving this is focused. The school's comprehensive arrangements for performance management also support this work, and the school is developing its systems for analysing and interpreting data. All statutory policies have been agreed, but the school does not meet statutory requirements for religious education in Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form, and for collective worship. Not all staff share and insist on high expectations of conduct and dress.

73. Planning for school development, both at whole school and faculty level, is generally good and clearly reflects the aims of the school. A clear framework for development planning is in place, linked to the budget cycle. The structure of the plan is good and includes action plans which identify priority areas and include targets and criteria for success, where faculty targets link explicitly to whole-school priorities. Its weaknesses are that it is not costed and that it covers only a period of one year. The outcomes of how faculties spend their budget is not monitored rigorously enough.

74. Training for performance management has been comprehensive, detailed and thorough. The performance management arrangements are fully integrated into the school management systems at all levels. Team leaders have been identified, initial interviews completed, and objectives for all staff agreed. Whole school and individual training needs have been identified, and arrangements to respond to these are in hand. An overall sense of coherence exists because the systems in place are the result of consultation with and agreement by staff, and are well considered.

75. Arrangements for the induction of new staff, including newly qualified staff, are detailed and thorough and take into account individual and whole school needs.

76. The school is well led and managed on a day-to-day basis. Good communication ensures that all staff are kept informed, and well established routines, understood by pupils and staff, contribute to the smooth running of the school. Day-to-day administration is efficient and effective. A comprehensive framework of meetings involving staff at all levels and governors has been introduced, with meetings clearly minuted and actions agreed. The staff handbook is detailed and provides staff with the information necessary to undertake their responsibilities.

77. School development is supported through careful financial planning. Spending decisions have improved the quality of both the environment and of the curriculum. The careful use of prudent savings for earmarked expenditure means that the school can make major purchases such as computer networks. Budget preparation and control is detailed and thorough. The budget is efficiently managed, a judgement which is confirmed by the most recent auditors' report. The principles of best value are applied through effective tendering arrangements which ensure competition, parental surveys, monitoring results and discussion with neighbouring schools.

78. In addition to the funding identified for the purpose, the school commits a significant amount of its resources to special educational needs. Arrangements for the management coordination and funding of provision for special educational needs are effective. Staff resources for special educational needs are deployed well.

79. Information technology is very well used for administration purposes as well as to support pupil's learning. However, the school has a particular problem with recently acquired equipment, which has prevented regular progress reports for parents from being produced and sent home.

80. Little progress has been made in some aspects of the school's work identified as areas for development in the last inspection report. The school concentrated its efforts on improving the quality of teaching and learning, with considerable success. This is exemplified by GCSE results which have improved faster than the national rate of improvement, and the high quality of teaching observed in this inspection. Provision for pupils with special educational needs has been improved, and the new coordinator has continued and built on the work of her predecessor. However, relatively little appears to have been done to address the other key issues before the appointment of the present headteacher. He is building a new senior management team, which was partly in place at the time of this inspection, and line management responsibilities are now functioning. The approach to school development is now more strategic than in the past. Although the provision of ICT across the curriculum is not significantly better, there has been notable investment in hardware and staff will begin to receive government-funded training in the next term. Provision for moral development is now good, although nothing has been done to improve provision for spiritual development. The school is once again experiencing staffing problems, having enjoyed a period of relative stability between the two inspections.

81. A variety of indicators shows the school to be effective. These include the GCSE results achieved, the quality of teaching, pupils' enthusiasm for school, and the quality of leadership, which indicates the capacity to improve things further. Despite high unit costs, the school provides sound value for money.

82. In common with many other schools, particularly in this region, the school finds it hard to recruit and retain staff. This is causing significant difficulties in a number of subject areas. In addition, several teachers are absent over the long-term due to illness. When the school was inspected there were temporary teachers in seven subjects. Teachers appointed in six of these subjects would take up their posts at the start of the next term. Teachers are over-stretched, working hard to try to make up for the shortfalls. Some departments run additional lessons during lunchtime and after school. The need to employ teachers who are only available part-time rather than full-time means that some classes have to be taught by more than one teacher. Where this is happening in English and science, it is having an adverse effect on the continuity of pupils' education in these subjects. In some cases, the quality of the teaching by non-specialist temporary and cover teachers is unsatisfactory. Some annual reports on pupils' attainment and progress have had to be sent home incomplete. The school is unable to ensure that all pupils have equal access to a high quality education in all areas.

83. This high turnover of staff was also identified as a problem in the last inspection report. The school is working hard to try to overcome these problems. There is a group investigating the issues relating to recruitment and retention of teachers, and, in response to the last inspection report's findings, teachers and non-teaching staff who are leaving the school are interviewed by governors and non-teaching staff. The school uses a policy of internal promotion to try to encourage stability and retention.

84. Most teachers are well qualified to teach their subjects to the appropriate level. Procedures for the induction and support of new staff and newly qualified teachers are very good. The school plays an important part in initial teacher training, as a member of a local consortium, and takes the

lead within the group in providing training in English and science. The specialist programme is detailed and comprehensive, and includes a high standard of professional mentoring.

85. The high quality of the teaching observed in such adverse circumstances pays tribute to the hard work and dedication of the staff of the school.

86. The school's accommodation is satisfactory. Most specialist accommodation is adequate, and the accommodation for physical education is very good. The provision of some new science laboratories and a Sixth Form centre has considerably enhanced provision in those areas. These are bright and well-lit, in contrast to rather drab accommodation elsewhere. Display in some areas helps to provide a stimulating environment. The accommodation for the teaching of music, including practice rooms, is unsatisfactory and provides a very poor teaching and learning environment. The site, including the grounds, is generally well maintained, although the physical education areas are not adequately cleaned, which represents a health and safety hazard in the changing rooms. The use by cars of some hard play areas also represents a safety risk.

87. All departments have adequate resources for learning, and there is good provision in a number of areas, such as English, geography, physical education, religious education and special educational needs. In many subjects, the provision of information technology resources is satisfactory, but there are not enough computers in design and technology and modern foreign languages. In addition, some subject departments find it difficult to book time in computer rooms. The ratio of computers available is close to the national average, but the school needs a greater range of peripheral items. Networked machines are dispersed throughout the school site, but there are few large clusters which can accommodate large classes. The school development plan identifies this as an area to be addressed, and the cabling infrastructure is in place to accommodate larger classes in a number of areas. When the school was inspected, there were problems with a network installation which had gone unresolved by the contractor for too long.

88. The library stock is below what is recommended for the size of the school, but it is of good quality and much is new, following an audit of stock. Some departments are supported by a good choice of library resources, for example the variety of texts and CD-ROMs for music. There are not enough up-to-date computers in the library, and the use of the library is limited to the times when it is open, as it is not used as a teaching area.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

89. In order to raise standards further and improve the quality of education provided by the school governors should:

- Persevere with efforts to recruit and retain staff in the context of the recruitment difficulties in the South East of England;
(Paragraphs: 2, 8, 23, 31, 53, 61, 64, 82, 83, 117, 143, 149, 191, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200)
- Implement plans for monitoring and evaluating the school's work, including analysing assessment data and evaluating the quality of teaching and of the education provided;
(Paragraphs: 23, 32, 33, 35, 37, 38, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 72, 73, 82, 114, 115, 135, 142, 144, 160, 194, 214, 216)
- Provide for pupils' spiritual development;
(Paragraphs: 41, 68, 72, 91, 210)
- Ensure that all staff insist on the same high standards of conduct and dress from pupils, and that the school's structures to support these expectations are effective;
(Paragraphs: 16, 17, 18, 20, 23, 48, 49, 61, 62, 72, 114, 132, 141, 142, 159, 160, 190, 206, 207)
- Meet statutory requirements for:
 - * Religious education in Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form;
(Paragraphs: 41, 68, 72, 91, 210)
 - * A daily act of collective worship.
(Paragraphs: 41, 68, 72)
- Ensure that all reports to parents contain all necessary information;
(Paragraphs: 63, 79)
- Provide adequately for the needs of pupils with English as an additional language.
(Paragraphs: 15, 38, 57, 71, 115)

90. In addition to the key issues above, the following less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the action plan:

- Review the time for geography and history in Key Stage 3;
(*Paragraphs: 32, 170, 172, 179*)
- Address the health and safety concerns raised during the inspection.
(*Paragraphs: 59, 86*)

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

KEY STAGE 4

91. The curriculum in Key Stage 4 includes all statutory requirements except for religious education. In addition, pupils do not have enough opportunities to use ICT within subjects. As there are no discrete ICT lessons in this key stage, pupils do not have enough chances to use these skills to develop them beyond the competence acquired in Key Stage 3.

92. However, the curriculum which is provided meets pupils' other needs. All pupils follow courses in English language and English literature, mathematics, physical education, personal and social education and science. For GCSE, pupils have a wide choice in science between single award, double award and separate sciences. Both French and Spanish are available as GCSE courses, but few pupils choose to study two languages. A few pupils study no foreign language, but follow courses in basic skills which are more suited to their needs. The options preparation given in Year 9 helps pupils to make the right choices for their personal programme. Options available in this key stage include other National Curriculum subjects, as well as business studies, drama, economics, and statistics. In addition, pupils may choose to follow a GNVQ course in leisure and tourism, at either Foundation or Intermediate level. All pupils have two weeks of work experience in Year 10. There is also a programme of personal and social education, which includes occasional one-day conferences on topics such as drugs misuse, racism and sex education.

93. The school has developed a good quality careers programme, as the involvement of the local careers service has been reduced in recent years. Over a 16 week period, the programme covers industry days, various careers events, extended work experience for some pupils, and the development of a range of skills useful for the world of work.

94. The school has been awarded DfEE Achievement awards for its success in GCSE examinations. The proportions of pupils gaining A*-C grades has risen steadily since the last inspection, at a faster rate than the rising national trend. The proportion of pupils who gained five or more A*-C grades in 2000 is well above the national average, and above average when compared both with similar schools and with schools achieving the same Key Stage 3 results. The proportions gaining five or more A*-G grades and one or more A*-G grades is close to the national average. When the average points scored by pupils is considered, the school's results are above the national average, but they do not compare favourably with those of similar schools or with schools with similar Key Stage 3 results.

THE SIXTH FORM

95. The number of students in the Sixth Form has grown significantly since the last inspection. Now, 60 per cent of students continue to study at the school after the age of 16. The Sixth Form is housed in a new, purpose built block, which provides very good accommodation.

96. Results in A Level examinations have been in line with national averages for the last three years, and the results in Advanced GNVQ awards last year are above average. There is variation between subjects in the proportion of higher grades scored in A Level examinations. There are good results in business studies and mathematics, but low proportions in biology, drama and textiles. In the main, Sixth Form students make satisfactory progress.

97. The curriculum is broad. A wide choice of A Level and AS Level subjects is available, including subjects not offered at GCSE, such as law, media studies and psychology. Advanced GNVQ or Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education courses are offered in business studies, leisure and recreation, and in travel and tourism. In addition, students can follow a GCSE course in astronomy, drama, English and mathematics. There is, however, no religious education in either year, and statutory requirements for this are not met. There is no key skills programme, though it is planned to introduce this in the next academic year.

98. Sixth Form students have opportunities to represent their peers in the School Council, and the Sixth Form sends representatives to the local Youth Parliament, and has one of six Essex Youth MPs.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	184
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	59

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3.8	17.9	50	17.9	7	3.3	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	1178	211
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	68	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth Form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	16	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	277	6

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	8

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	41
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	31

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	7.6

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.5

National comparative data	7.7
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National comparative data	1.1
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Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	110	119	229

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	59	81	77
	Girls	102	100	99
	Total	161	181	176
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	70 (70)	80 (79)	77 (72)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	34 (32)	58 (51)	42 (39)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	62	84	72
	Girls	100	104	100
	Total	162	188	172
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	72 (71)	82 (81)	75 (71)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	31 (37)	61 (54)	42 (37)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	126	102	228

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	73	114	119
	Girls	70	96	99
	Total	143	210	218
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	63 (63)	92 (96)	96 (98)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	41 (43.3)
	National	38.4 (38)

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	21	81
	National		N/A

Attainment at the end of the Sixth Form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A Level or AS Level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2000	39	51

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	15.2 (13.4)	15.3 (16.4)	15.2 (15.9)	1.8 (3)	2.8 (4)	2.4 (3.3)
National	17.7 (17.1)	18.6 (18.1)	18.2 (17.9)	2.6 (2.7)	2.9 (2.8)	2.7 (2.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0	0
	National	0	0

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	1
Indian	5
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	4
Chinese	2
White	1366
Any other minority ethnic group	10

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	27	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 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	78.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff:

Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	165

Deployment of teachers:

Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.8
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Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	3532312.00
Total expenditure	3454042.00
Expenditure per pupil	2615.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	250643.00
Balance carried forward to next year	328913.00

Average teaching group size:**Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	26.4
Key Stage 4	21.7

Results of the survey of parents and carers**Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	1321
Number of questionnaires returned	504

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	28	60	9	2	2
My child is making good progress in school.	28	57	9	2	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	13	58	16	6	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	15	61	17	5	2
The teaching is good.	12	65	14	3	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	20	52	22	5	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	39	50	8	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	39	52	6	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	18	53	21	5	4
The school is well led and managed.	17	49	15	7	12
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	21	62	10	2	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	28	50	9	2	11

Other issues raised by parents

Parents are concerned at the high turnover of teachers.

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

ENGLISH

99. When pupils enter the school, standards of attainment in English are in line with national expectations. Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 in 2000 are above the national average, but below average when compared to those of similar schools. Inspection evidence indicates that standards in English are broadly in line with national averages at the end of Key Stage 3.

100. In 2000, GCSE results in English Language and English Literature were above the national average and in line with results in similar schools. During the inspection, the standard of work of pupils in English at Key Stage 4 was seen to be broadly in line with national averages. There is a difference between the attainment of boys and girls in both key stages, with girls outperforming boys, particularly in Key Stage 4. In both key stages pupils with special educational needs attain well, and reach standards that are good in relation to their prior attainment. In both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 achievement in English is satisfactory, but pupils do not make such good progress as they do in mathematics and science.

101. Students in the Sixth Form achieved results in GCE A Level examinations in 2000 which are broadly in line with national results. Inspection evidence confirms that students currently achieve similar standards.

102. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards in speaking and listening are satisfactory, and many pupils reach good standards. An example of how teachers develop these skills was to be seen in a Year 7 lesson, where pupils prepared speeches on the problems encountered in the outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease, and discussed strategies for improving their public speaking performance. The pupils' suggestions for each other were challenging: one pupil suggested the use of syntactic parallelism to enliven the speech, as Winston Churchill had done in his wartime speeches to the country.

103. Standards in speaking and listening in Key Stage 4 are generally in line with national standards, with some higher attaining pupils achieving good and very good standards. In a Year 11 lesson on the poem 'The Beggar Woman', pupils confidently explored the poem by discussing the poet's possible intentions and the reader's emotive responses. The well managed discussion enabled them to explore two ideas simultaneously, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the poem. Standards in speaking and listening in the Sixth Form are good, as evidenced in a Year 13 lesson on Donne's 'Divine Meditation'. Pupils in this lesson articulately explored the tension between Catholicism and science, demonstrating a high level of critical appreciation and insight.

104. Standards in reading are broadly in line with national standards at the end of Key Stage 3. Pupils read a range of literature. For example, in a very good Year 8 lesson, pupils read three poems which enabled them to understand the problems encountered by teachers. Their reading gave the pupils with an appreciation of the role of the teacher, and extended their vocabulary. Pupils

quickly assimilated new language and used it confidently to write a diary entry written by a teacher during a school inspection.

105. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils read with a satisfactory degree of sensitivity and understanding. The best example of this was observed in a Year 10 lesson where pupils were asked to distinguish fact from opinion in an article on capital punishment. Pupils were guided through the reading of the text in stages, and this structured support helped them to identify not only the structure of the argument as it developed, but also how language can be used to bias a text.

106. Students in the Sixth Form read widely around their prescribed texts, and show a good knowledge and understanding of literary criticism. The library is used well by students in the Sixth Form, but less frequently by pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4. The use of individual reading programmes on computers is also helping less experienced readers to build up vocabulary and practise grammatical constructions. In a successful Year 7 lesson, pupils combined information from a wide variety of research resources, including electronic encyclopaedias, to develop their knowledge and understanding of the consequences of smoking. Pupils of all abilities were able to interpret information from a range of graphical and textual material.

107. Standards in writing are in line with national standards at the end of Key Stage 3. The use of a wide range of writing methods helps pupils improve. An excellent lesson on Macbeth with lower attaining pupils in Year 9 illustrated the success of a variety of imaginative and challenging writing strategies, which had been employed over a series of lessons. These had supported lower attaining pupils' writing skills, which had developed significantly as a result.

108. In Key Stage 4 standards in writing are also in line with national standards. Presentation is often excellent, which shows a high level of commitment to the subject. There is much evidence of pupils of all abilities drafting and redrafting their work, and using information and communications technology as a tool for improving presentation. Higher attaining pupils produce creative pieces of writing of exceptionally high quality, and achieve the highest grades at GCSE. For example, a Year 11 pupil wrote, in a poem called 'The Granite Curtain',

'Space kisses our faces,
As we step out of our homes,
To meet with other races,
and have peace between our peoples'.

109. However, some lower attaining pupils still experience difficulty with accuracy in spelling and grammar, which frequently affects the clarity of their writing and hinders the reader's understanding. Despite these technical weaknesses, pupils produce imaginative pieces which clearly demonstrate an understanding of the audience and purpose for which they are writing. Standards of writing in the Sixth Form are good. Pupils' written work is lucid, cogent, and demonstrates clearly the development of a personal viewpoint.

110. Teaching is good. It was judged to be good in at least 85 per cent of lessons, of which 18.5 per cent were very good and a further 11 per cent excellent. Teaching was poor in only one lesson.

111. Most teachers display good subject knowledge and have high expectations of pupils, and their planning is satisfactory. In the best lessons, teachers explain at the outset what they expect pupils to learn, and revisit these objectives at the end of the lesson to check that learning has taken place. Pupils are drawn into taking an active part in lessons because tasks are well structured, as in a Year 8 lesson on fox hunting, where a well organised formal debate enabled pupils of all abilities to learn about the issues from clearly presented and well researched arguments.

112. Teachers' good questioning techniques and feedback allows pupils to make very good gains in understanding. An excellent example was a Year 8 lesson on animal experimentation, where a structure of rapid timed responses helped pupils juxtapose their ideas and develop a perspective of both sides of the argument very quickly.

113. As a result of such good pace, and of high expectations, stimulating and well planned lessons, and extended plenary sessions to consolidate learning, pupils in many lessons made good progress. Pupils learn to examine information and discuss it with confidence. Most become more articulate, and they develop confidence and, in some cases, eloquence in public speaking. Higher attaining pupils learn to consider a wide range of texts, and develop sensitivity to the way language is used, to convey meaning but also to influence the reader. All these experiences feed into the way pupils learn to write in a variety of contexts. This practice is well supported by the use of strategies such as structured writing frames.

114. Learning is less assured where time is not managed effectively and the learning objectives are not kept in focus. In such instances lesson plans need to have more clearly defined learning objectives, which are shared with the pupils, in order to develop a shared learning experience. The lesson planning should also include work appropriate for all ability levels in the class, including work to develop the most able pupils to their full potential. Teaching in one lesson was poor because little learning took place. The poor behaviour of many pupils in this group was not well managed.

115. Much work has been done in the English Department to tackle the points for action identified in the previous inspection report. The library has been developed, and there has been improvement in resources for information and communications technology, and in links with the learning support department. There are, however, still areas for further development. There are some inconsistencies in assessment practice across the department. While some teachers mark carefully and give good guidance on how to improve, other marking is not so helpful. Neither the school's assessment system nor National Curriculum levels are regularly used by all teachers to indicate the standard of work. The work of the department is not monitored rigorously enough to ensure that areas of good practice are shared and weaker aspects rectified, and that standards continue to rise. Information technology is not incorporated into the department's short term planning as an integral part of teaching and learning. Provision for pupils with English as an additional language is not consistently well organised.

116. Pupils' attitudes are generally good at all key stages, and behaviour in the classroom is good in nearly all cases. Most pupils respond in a mature manner in discussions and are enthusiastic about their work. They sustain concentration, have a businesslike approach to their work, and co-operate well with each other and with their teachers.

117. The head of faculty works hard to overcome the many difficulties associated with the high turnover of staff. This is an enthusiastic and energetic department whose members all work very hard to raise standards.

DRAMA

118. Standards in drama are in line with expectation at all stages. At the end of Key Stage 4, GCSE results are slightly above the national average. Standards at A-level are satisfactory, although the numbers are too small to draw meaningful comparisons.

119. Pupils confidently use a range of drama techniques and understand the language of the subject well. Pupils are able to explore ideas and create performances using freeze frames, as in a Year 8 lesson where short cameos were used to depict incidents in a Victorian crowd scene in 'Oliver Twist'. Pupils are also able to use drama to explore issues such as a lesson on the 'Gretford Disaster'. In this lesson, Year 8 pupils in role explored emotional responses to a tragedy by using 'thought bubbles' to express an opinion.

120. In a Year 11 lesson pupils gained not only an understanding of the dramatic process through participation but were also able to analyse meanings and feelings using small improvisations. Lower attaining pupils in this group used a variety of strategies including a Greek chorus to enhance their presentation. Progress across the key stages is generally satisfactory in drama, despite severe staffing problems. Much has been done to improve standards since the last inspection. A new head of department has improved planning and put into place various strategies to raise attainment. One of these is providing extra lessons after school and during the vacations.

121. The quality of teaching in drama is good. Teachers have high expectations, which produce positive responses from the pupils resulting in refreshingly lively pieces of work. Pupils were observed confidently managing and evaluating their own improvisations, and making subtle changes to them. Teachers give good feedback to pupils, which enables them to gain confidence and develop further skills. The work of drama is enriched with frequent theatre trips, one of which included a backstage tour in Drury Lane.

MATHEMATICS

122. Very good progress has been made in tackling the issues raised at the last inspection. Teaching has improved and standards have risen. The head of department provides very good leadership to a cohesive team of teachers who have worked hard to secure this improvement. Curriculum planning, including grouping pupils by prior attainment, is good and successfully underpins the drive to provide a broad mathematics experience and raise the standard of pupils' work. The trend of external assessment results at the end of Years 9, 11 and 13 is upwards. Standards reached by pupils are well above national expectations at the end of Years 9 and 11, and above A Level course expectations at the end of Year 13.

123. Pupils' attainment in mathematics on entry to the school in Year 7 is above average, as illustrated by end of Key Stage 2 test results.

124. At the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is well above national expectations, and some pupils in the higher sets reach very high standards. The National Curriculum test results in 2000 confirm this inspection evidence, as the results are well above national averages. The 2000 test results are above average for similar schools for the percentage gaining Level 5 and above, and well above average for the higher levels of six and above. By the end of Key Stage 3, higher attaining pupils can calculate unknown angles in complex diagrams, including those containing parallel lines, and have good algebraic skills. Average attainers can recognise the scale factor used in enlarging diagrams and use this to find unknown sides. Lower attainers can calculate simple percentages and multiply two by three digit numbers.

125. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils are reaching standards well above national expectations, with some pupils in the highest set achieving very high standards. The 2000 GCSE results are well above national averages at A*-C and just above national averages at A*-G. Nearly all pupils are entered for the GCSE examination. In the 1999 GCSE examination, girls achieved much better results than boys, but in 2000 there was very little difference. These latest results reflect the pattern of attainment seen during the inspection. Comparison of the 2000 GCSE results with those of schools with similar prior attainment at Key Stage 3 shows that the higher and most average attainers did much better than expected. Most of the rest did as well as expected.

126. By the end of Key Stage 4, higher attainers can simplify a wide range of algebraic expressions. They can sketch a number of functions, e.g. cubic ones, and describe their properties. Average attainers can use graphs to solve equations and find the volume of prisms. Lower attainers can calculate the area of a number of shapes and use their knowledge of angle properties to find unknown angles.

127. Attainment at the end of Year 13 is above national course averages, and some students reach very high standards. For example, a few students have achieved almost full marks in modules already taken. The 2000 examination results in GCE A Level in mathematics are

well above course averages. All students passed, and over four fifths received A or B grades. However, the number taking mathematics courses, especially in Year 12, has increased, and students are entering the Sixth Form with a wider range of prior attainment. This has reduced the proportion, but not the number, reaching the highest standards.

128. By the end of Year 13, students have a good foundation of technical knowledge and skill, for example in calculus and algebra, which they can apply to other aspects of mathematics such as mechanics and statistics. Higher attainers are able to choose from a wide range of skills, and successfully use them to answer increasingly complex problems. Lower attainers can apply standard techniques to more straightforward questions, but have more difficulties in coping with more unusual or complex ones.

129. There was no discernible difference in the attainment of boys and girls throughout the school. Standards are similar across all aspects of mathematics, except that the speed with which many pupils reach answers using mental arithmetic methods could be improved.

130. Most pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4, including those with special educational needs, achieve well. Good teaching, setting in all years except Year 7, and most pupils' hard work and good behaviour, are key factors in this progress. Pupils consolidate and then build on their existing skill base across all aspects of mathematics. Higher attainers, in particular, make very good progress in algebra, which provides a solid foundation for later work. Average and lower attainers make good progress in developing their knowledge and skills, but do not make as much progress as higher attainers in understanding how to use these in more difficult, or new, situations. A few pupils, mainly, but not all, lower attainers, make satisfactory rather than good progress, as they are not prepared to work and so do not make the best use of lesson time. At times, this also has a negative effect on the progress of others in their class.

131. Students in Years 12 and 13 achieve well. Students' positive attitude to work, good teaching, and good individual support from mathematics staff, are key factors in this good progress. The modular curriculum, including provision for further mathematics, enables students to put together a mathematics programme well suited to their needs.

132. Pupils' behaviour and attitude to work is generally good in Key Stages 3 and 4, and it is always good in the Sixth Form. In both Key Stages 3 and 4, although most pupils come to mathematics lessons well prepared and eager to learn, there is a small proportion, mainly boys, who do not. Because of this, teachers have sometimes to spend more time than they should in establishing a working atmosphere.

133. The quality of teaching observed during the inspection week was good overall particularly good in the Sixth Form. In an eighth of lessons seen teaching was very good, and there was a corresponding proportion of unsatisfactory teaching. Teaching was good in half the lessons seen and satisfactory in the remaining quarter.

134. Teachers have a very good knowledge of mathematics, which they use to give clear explanations and to choose relevant examples to capture pupils' interest. Teachers are skilled at using more concrete, day to day, examples for lower attaining groups and moving quickly to a more

abstract level for higher attainers. This helps different groups to progress at a suitable rate. In good, or very good lessons, more time is spent in whole class discussion, getting pupils to think about different ways of dealing with problems, and questions and answers are used effectively to draw the strands of the lesson together. This helps pupils to achieve more by making them justify their methods and helping them to review their progress. There is strong class management, which makes sure that pupils know how they are expected to behave and ensures that they do so, providing an atmosphere which encourages learning. Characteristic of the very good teaching are lively lessons where the pace is brisk and pupils are really pushed to think about difficult ideas. Where teaching is satisfactory, rather than good or very good, the teacher often spends too much time with individuals, as opposed to working with the whole class. This can lead to slower progress for some other pupils. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, this is because the teacher has to spend too much time trying to make pupils work, and the resulting progress is too slow.

135. There is some monitoring of teaching, and teachers look at samples of pupils' written work to discuss the best ways of improving standards. However, there is a need for more classroom observation to make sure best practice is maintained, particularly in the light of staffing changes. The assessment of pupils' work is good. Work is usually regularly marked, and feedback on work carried out in class is clear. Pupils know how well they are doing and which areas they have to work at to improve. There are regular tests at the end of each module of work, which helps staff to check progress and see if some topics need more attention. The mathematics curriculum meets statutory requirements but there are not enough opportunities to use information technology. This is partly due to problems with the school's network of new computers.

SCIENCE

136. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 is well above national expectations. In the national tests in 2000, the percentages of pupils reaching at least Level 5 and those reaching at least Level 6 were both very high compared with the corresponding national averages. Test results are above average compared with those from schools who have pupils from similar social backgrounds. Although the overall performance in national tests has changed little in the last three years, the proportion of those reaching the higher levels has risen. Work seen during the inspection confirms the high standards represented by the test results. During Key Stage 3, all pupils acquire knowledge and understanding equally well in all the attainment targets. Pupils with high attainment show above average understanding of topics such as electromagnetism and the structure and function of cells. Skills in experimental and investigative science are developed well from the beginning of Year 7 onwards. By the end of the key stage, high attaining pupils carry out investigations of a very high standard on a range of topics such as, for example, the effect of surface area on the rate of reaction of marble chips with acid. Standards of literacy and numeracy are above average, and the majority of pupils have a secure knowledge of scientific vocabulary, although pupils with low attainment cannot always describe their work in complete sentences and have difficulties in drawing conclusions from the results of their experiments. Pupils with special educational needs acquire knowledge effectively when they are given good support, and record experimental results neatly and accurately.

137. By the age of 16, attainment is well above the national average overall. Performance in GCSE examinations is above average in Double Award science, and in physics, chemistry and

biology, as measured by the proportions of pupils gaining at least grade C and those gaining at least grade G. The results of pupils taking Single Award science are below expectations. However, in considering the total number of grades achieved at grade C or better over all the science examinations, results are well above national expectations. Results in science examinations have improved significantly in recent years. Girls reach standards higher than boys in biology, chemistry and physics, but lower than boys in Double Award science. Attainment in lessons and in pupils' written work shows a similar pattern to that represented by the examination results. High attaining pupils show very good understanding of, for example, genetics and inheritance and the electron structure of compounds.

138. Some pupils with low attainment and with special educational needs show little confidence in science, and their limited understanding of vocabulary and concepts means that they need substantial support in lessons. As in Key Stage 3, standards of literacy are above average and most pupils can speak articulately about their science. Pupils of all levels of attainment have mathematical skills at least adequate to support their work.

139. There is some variation in standards between different subjects in the Sixth Form, but A Level results in physics have been consistently above the national average in the last three years. In the 2000 examinations, all students achieved at least grade E, which is above national expectations, but the proportions reaching the higher grades of A or B in biology and chemistry were below the national average. Standards have consistently risen over the last few years in GCSE astronomy, which is taken by some students as an additional subject in the Sixth Form.

140. Achievement is good overall in Key Stages 3 and 4. As a result of good teaching and the positive approach to work by the majority, most pupils' acquisition of knowledge and understanding of science, and their skills in experimental and investigative work, proceeds at a greater rate than expected nationally. At both key stages, pupils with higher prior attainment achieve better than those with low attainment and special educational needs. For the latter groups of pupils some lessons are not well matched to their specific needs. The poor attitude to learning of some pupils results in slower than expected progress. In the Sixth Form, achievement is good in physics and satisfactory in biology and chemistry.

141. Teaching is good overall. Almost seven lessons out of ten were judged to be good, with examples of very good teaching. Only one lesson was judged to be less than satisfactory. In lessons considered good or very good, well-focused questioning, careful lesson structure, and articulate responses from confident pupils lead to effective gains in knowledge and understanding. For example, pupils in Year 7 gained good insight into the structure of solids, liquids and gases as a result of a lesson which consisted of a range of short, varied activities. Teachers' good subject knowledge and a clear sense of intellectual authority establishes a positive learning environment in most lessons, so that pupils are quickly aware of the high expectations being demanded of them. Persistent attention to challenging detail contributes significantly to pupils' learning. In a Sixth Form chemistry lesson, the teacher repeatedly brought students back to fundamental principles to help them overcome their difficulties in determining heat exchanges in reactions, so that they were able to progressively build on their prior understanding. Good use is made of practical work to allow pupils to make links effectively between theory and experiment, such as the use of displacement reactions to develop understanding of the reactivity series of metals. In some good and very good lessons, the

use of well-structured discussions gives teachers a good awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of pupils knowledge and understanding. In such cases, learning proceeds at a good pace, such as in a Year 13 lesson on applications of the laws of electromagnetic induction. In some lessons, particularly in Key Stage 4, pupils learn well because the challenging behaviour of some pupils is well contained, and teachers show a calm but firm approach in maintaining a positive learning environment. Available resources of equipment and books are used to good effect, so that all pupils gain good first hand experience of science through experiment and have immediate access to other sources of information. In many lessons, pupils contribute significantly to their own progress by their keenness to learn. They respond well to questions and have a better than average command of English, and most take a pride in the presentation of their work. They enjoy experimental science and their procedures are safe and purposefully carried out.

142. Where teaching is judged to be satisfactory rather than good, some pupils learn less effectively than expected. Some lessons do not cater sufficiently well for the needs of all the pupils in the group, particularly those with low prior attainment and, in some cases, those with special educational needs. Poor lesson structure sometimes leads to slow learning because pupils are not made clearly aware of the purpose of a lesson. Questioning is neither used effectively at the start to establish prior knowledge and understanding, nor at the end to establish what gains have been made. In a few lessons, particularly but not exclusively in Key Stage 4, weak management of behaviour allows pupils to chatter throughout a lesson, diverting attention from their own work and that of others. Most teachers mark effectively and make helpful comments on pupils' work. However, some marking is perfunctory, with little guidance to help pupils improve, and there are few instances where marking gives clear indications of the standard of work in relation to national expectations.

143. Leadership and management in the department are good. The enthusiastic head of science, who is new in the post this school year, has a good awareness of the current strengths of the department and the needs for future development, and has a good vision of how to lead his hardworking team forward. Difficulties in staffing have led to disruption in the continuity of the education provided for some pupils, and the team has worked hard to make up the deficiencies. Documentation, although still under revision, is well-written and concise. The weekly science newsletter is an effective means of communication between members of a large department. Schemes of work give some good guidance for teachers and are being updated to take account of recent changes in the National Curriculum. The introduction of triple science (biology, chemistry and physics) in Key Stage 4 is having a positive impact on the standards achieved by pupils with high attainment, and the curriculum in the Sixth Form has been given additional breadth by the introduction of A Level electronics and GCSE astronomy.

144. Procedures for assessing the attainment of pupils are good, and examination and test results are regularly analysed. Knowledge of pupils' attainment is used effectively to form groups of pupils with similar attainment and to monitor their progress, but little use is made of data to inform teaching or curriculum development. The monitoring of the work of the department, including the teaching, is not well developed, and, although there has been some informal lesson observation in the past, there is no rigorous programme of self-evaluation. Resources of equipment and books are good and are used very effectively. The hardworking technical staff give very good support to the work of the department.

145. Since the last inspection, standards have risen, particularly in GCSE results and in the work of pupils with high attainment. Teaching has also improved significantly, although provision in lessons for the full range of ability could be improved. Assessment of pupils is now secure, but the department has some way to go in making good use of its assessment data. The management of the department continues to be good and is developing well.

ART

146. At the end of Key Stage 3, standards are in line with national expectations, and pupils' achievement over the key stage is satisfactory. At the end of Key Stage 4, the percentage of passes at GCSE grades A*-C was above national expectations in 1999 and 2000. This was an improvement on the percentage of passes at GCSE grades A*-C in 1998, which was below national expectations. Inspection evidence confirms the rise in standards. In the Sixth Form, the percentage of A Level passes in grades A and B was above average in 2000, an improvement on the previous year, when it was below average. Teachers' assessments and observations of work carried out during the inspection indicate that standards achieved by students in the current Year 13 are again below average, but those of students in Year 12 are more in line with what is expected.

147. In Key Stage 3, pupils have a sound knowledge of the work of artists and a good understanding of colour theory. These skills are evident in painted and collaged images based on Celtic and Indian art, where a design-based approach produced bold and decorative images. In Year 7, pupils show an imaginative approach to three-dimensional work, producing, for example, chair sculptures based on elements of paintings by Rousseau. Pupils' work shows a selective use of mark-making, and control of techniques for using paint and pastels. However, the use of sketch books as a means of collecting and developing ideas is inconsistent.

148. In Key Stage 4, pupils' skills in using colour, form and composition produce lively and confident work, including, for example, paintings of natural forms. Monochrome drawings of plant sections and still life compositions in colour reflect observational skills. Sketchbooks are used constructively and reflect the way pupils use artists' work to develop their own ideas. In the Sixth Form, students experiment with materials to explore a range of issues and concepts. The analysis and influence of the work of artists such as Van Gogh, Cezanne and Chagall are evident in students' explorations and in their finished pieces of work. Sketchbooks are used abundantly and demonstrate a thorough and independent working process. However, some students in the current Year 13 are too heavily dependent on images copied from photographs and magazines. This tends to lead to work which lacks inventiveness.

149. Teaching is nearly always satisfactory, and over one third is good and nearly one fifth very good. Only one poor lesson was observed. The quality of teaching in Key Stage 3 is uneven, because of a number of staffing changes. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory in Key Stage 3, but in Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form, where teaching is more consistently of good quality, pupils achieve well.

150. Teachers have good relationships with pupils. This enables pupils to learn by engaging with teachers in analysis and discussion of work in progress. Pupils are encouraged to explore the use of a wide range of materials in producing work in two and three dimensions. Skills and theoretical knowledge are frequently reinforced, so that pupils develop a secure understanding of the subject. Classrooms are organised efficiently, pupils are well managed, and teachers have clear expectations of pupils' behaviour. In this way a positive learning environment is created for pupils. This enables pupils of all abilities to succeed, although high attaining pupils in Year 9 are not always sufficiently challenged. A good contribution to pupils' social and cultural development is made by visits in this country and abroad, organised by the art department, and by the study of artists' work as indicated in the schemes of work. The schemes of work offer rich opportunities for the department to contribute to the spiritual and moral development of pupils, but are not fully explored. Although there are two computers in the art department, there is little evidence of the use of information and communications technology in pupils' work.

151. Teachers use a comprehensive system for monitoring and assessing pupils' work. This provides teachers and pupils with a clear picture of achievement and progress, which the department is now relating to the National Curriculum levels for art. The department uses a number of strategies to provide equal learning opportunities for all pupils. These include homework sheets, displays of specialist vocabulary, opportunities for use of the art rooms in extra-curricular time, and clearly-displayed lesson objectives. However, not enough is done to identify and support pupils with a particular talent for art.

152. Pupils in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 generally behave well, are willing to respond to teachers' questions, and are enthusiastic about their work. Students in the Sixth Form are articulate and friendly. They show maturity and involvement in their approach to the subject. Many pupils take part in visits to galleries in London and abroad in Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form and are involved in extra-curricular art work. However, there are few opportunities for pupils of all ages to work with visiting artists.

153. The department is well managed, with good lines of communication between teachers. Provision of art studio space for the Sixth Form has a positive impact on students' attitudes to independent study and their development as artists. Issues raised in the last inspection have been addressed successfully, although there is further work to do on the use of sketchbooks in Key Stage 3.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

154. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above the national average. Teacher assessments in 2000 indicated that attainment in this key stage was well above the national average. Since then there have been staffing changes and difficulties, and lesson observation and scrutiny of work during the inspection suggest that standards have declined.

155. Pupils in this key stage experience an interesting range of focused tasks and design assignments in different subject areas, and achieve satisfactory standards. Pupils build up a folder of

work for each activity in a programme which covers food, textiles, resistant materials, electronics and graphics. Work in folders is progressive, and it shows positive

evidence of a growing resource of skills, knowledge and technological understanding. However, the quality of graphics varies considerably, and pupils are not always able to present their ideas effectively. There is some use of information and communications technology skills, but it is irregular because of limited provision in programmes of work, and limited access to computers. Working in different media, pupils develop a range of practical skills which they use in manufacturing and making design products. The overall quality of practical work is satisfactory, but standards do vary between activity areas. The quality of work in food and textiles is especially high. Higher attaining pupils demonstrate a personal style, and make good progress when the work is challenging. Teachers have focused attention on the development of technical vocabulary, and this is contributing to improved standards in written work. Pupils are aware of assessment criteria and of how to improve their work, and they achieve well.

156. Attainment in Key Stage 4 is above the national average. Pupils may opt for a GCSE examination course in food, textiles, resistant materials, graphics, electronics, or a combined course in graphics and business studies. Studies are much more focused and make greater demands on pupils.

157. Pupils acquire knowledge and skills through a number of assignments. They develop planning and presentational skills through design folders, and manufacture and make products in different materials. The range of graphical techniques is extended and the overall quality of design folders is good. Pupils achieve well. They are provided with clear outlines of the tasks, assessment criteria, timescales and resource implications, and this structured support contributes a great deal to success in examinations. There is evidence of a range of information and communications technology skills in design folders, but pupils do experience problems in gaining adequate access to computers. There is some outstanding work in all areas, but, as in Key Stage 3, the very high marks in food and textiles are a feature of the department. The standard of practical work is good, and the department is able to display a wide range of high quality product design. In 2000, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C in external examinations was well above the national average, although achievement varies between the different subjects, and results in electronics, food and textiles results are particularly high. A particular achievement was the number of pupils achieving A* and A grades.

158. Attainment in the Sixth Form is in line with national averages. A-Level courses are offered in product design or textiles. Numbers are small, and results in 2000 are average in resistant materials but below average in textiles. Pupils build on their interests and show a capacity for individual work, and growing maturity. An excellent example of this is a piece of research on Versace by a textiles student.

159. Most pupils show interest and enthusiasm for their studies. They respond positively to the range of attractive activities offered to them, but a small number of boys in Year 8 and Year 11 waste their own time and affect the work of others through noisy and inappropriate behaviour. This is also a factor in the gap between the attainment of girls and boys which was evident in some lessons. Overall, however, behaviour is good, and relationships between pupils and with teachers are also good. Pupils observe appropriate codes of conduct in specialist rooms, and they use equipment and machinery sensibly and confidently. Pupils with special educational needs make

good progress in their work. Through the assessment system, attainment and progress is reviewed and targets are set for future work.

160. Teaching is at least satisfactory in four fifths of lessons, and it is good in over half, with several examples of very good teaching and one example of excellent teaching. However, there is a significant proportion of unsatisfactory teaching. Teachers are hard working, and they organise and manage resources to good effect. They use display well and provide pupils with exemplar materials to establish quality levels. The best lessons have high expectations, pace, structure and purpose, and all pupils are properly challenged. Teachers have introduced an effective revised assessment scheme to enable them to develop individual pupil profiles and to equip all staff with extra details of pupils' progress. In the lessons where teaching is unsatisfactory, poor behaviour is not controlled, and this slows the pace of the lesson so pupils make less progress than they should. Not enough is expected of pupils, which also results in unsatisfactory progress. Teachers are well supported by two experienced and competent technicians who contribute a great deal to the smooth running of the department.

161. The faculty is ably led by a committed teacher, who has been appointed since the last inspection. She has introduced a number of organisational and educational changes. Administrative procedures are good and documentation is full and detailed, but schemes of work have yet to be updated and brought into a common format. The nature and rate of change which has been introduced, together with a number of staff changes, has posed some difficulties.

162. Accommodation is adequate, although some rooms are small for practical activities and storage space is limited. There is no specialist graphics room, and this has restricted the development of a broader range of techniques. A food room needs to be refurbished, and, although governors have approved expenditure no action has yet been taken. Since the last inspection there have been improvements in GCSE results, which are now above the national average. Not enough progress has been made in improving Key Stage 3 graphics and in developing the use of information and communications technology. However, the new assessment scheme is a very positive move in providing details of pupils' attainment and progress. Some health and safety issues were drawn to the attention of the school.

GEOGRAPHY

163. Standards in geography are high. In GCSE examinations, 78 per cent of students gained A*-C grades, which is well above the national average of 54 per cent. These results continue a steady overall improvement over the last three years. Virtually all pupils achieve a pass, which is above average. Inspection evidence confirms these standards. The percentage of A* grades has risen steadily, and is now about twice the national average at 72 per cent. Boys' results are significantly better than those of girls, but this difference was not apparent in lessons observed and work scrutinised. A Level results are more erratic. Results in 2000 are below the national average, but they are up on 1999 and well down on those of 1998. Boys' results are in line with the average, but the gender variation changes from year to year.

164. Attainment at Key Stage 3 is in line with the national average, although the work of pupils in top sets is above average. Basic geographical skills are put in place early in Year 7. Pupils gain a good knowledge of place, and can understand and use mapping techniques and map reading. Use of number is good. Pupils can measure line, angle, area and height in work on plans, contours and coordinates. These skills were observed in a Year 7 imaginary map exercise. Pupils also learn and use investigative techniques throughout Key Stage 3, which prepares them well for future GCSE and Sixth Form work. Projects range from studies of local communities in Year 7 to very high quality enquiries by higher attainers in Year 9, on the Amazon rainforest and industries in Brazil. Written skills mature throughout Key Stage 3 and most pupils are able to use a variety of styles. In Year 8 there are good examples of imaginative writing about daily life in the Nile delta, and extended writing comparing the Kikuyu and Masai tribes. Results of teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 are above average, but there are significant differences between boys and girls. Girls' results are well above average at Level 5 and particularly so at Level 6, whereas boys' results are below average at Level 5 and above average at the higher level.

165. Exercises using the school environment, local geography and the world map give pupils spatial awareness and a knowledge of places. Pupils' achievement in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory, and older pupils make good progress in Key Stage 4. Due in large measure to the clear understanding of processes and patterns gained in Key Stage 3, and the continuity in planning between key stages, older pupils also become confident in the use of statistical methods and geographical modelling. A great strength is the development of enquiry work. By Key Stages 4 and the Sixth Form, many pupils are able to produce well thought out coursework in which they can develop hypotheses, gather and analyse data, and reach logical conclusions. This is seen to advantage in the physical study of coastal erosion at Walton-on-the-Naze and the investigation of Retail and Industry in Great Dunmow. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress. They complete a variety of written tasks. With the help of writing frames, they build up a good volume of extended and imaginative writing, such as Year 9 descriptions of holidays and writing about the effects of volcanic eruptions. Across the key stages, enquiry work in particular is supported by the use of information and communications technology. Pupils continually improve their skills, which include word processing, spreadsheets, the graphical presentation of data, and research from the Internet. Sixth Form students use Powerpoint for presentations.

166. Teaching in all but one lesson was at least satisfactory, nearly half good, and a further one third very good. Lessons are conducted with energy and enthusiasm and a deal of good humour. Pupils are interested and involved in lessons that are planned well and offer a variety of activities and techniques. Teachers' high expectations ensure that pupils at all levels of attainment work at a good pace and cover a lot of ground. Good probing questions and innovative ideas keep levels of concentration high. This is particularly so when pupils are required to work in groups to produce and make presentations, including role play, as seen in Year 7 work on flooding in Bangladesh.

167. Teachers' good knowledge and the selective use of audio visual aids adds an extra dimension to lessons and keep pupils on task. Good questioning and high expectations of involvement of pupils leads to a brisk pace and good progress. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs are well catered for, but the opportunities to help gifted and talented pupils are not included in schemes of work.

168. Day-to-day marking is good, but in Key Stage 3 the school system is not clear enough in its links to National Curriculum levels. Homework is an integral part of lessons. It is set regularly, with expected outcomes explained, and is reviewed when it is returned to pupils.

169. The unsatisfactory lesson did not plan enough challenging work for the pupils, who became frustrated and behaved badly. However, the great majority of lessons are conducted in a friendly atmosphere and, in Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form in particular, pupils are mature and behave very well. Attitudes to work and relationships are positive. Pupils cooperate and value each others' contributions. They respond well when challenges are set, and persevere with tasks. Their high levels of understanding stem from a positive response to challenges, which require them to persevere with tasks, as was seen in a Year 7 lesson producing a radio broadcast about flooding in Bangladesh. Pupils are lively and their energy is often well harnessed to produce good work.

170. Since the last inspection the department has made good progress. It has maintained standards in those areas noted as good in the last report and, in addition, has made significant improvements in information and communications technology and the enquiry process. Information and communications technology now plays an important role in pupils' enquiry and investigative skills, which are acquired in Key Stage 3 and honed thereafter. This area is now a strength of the department. The time allowed for geography has not increased.

171. In a difficult time, the acting head of department, with the help of committed teachers, has maintained the department's strengths, and has continued improving other areas, all of which is having a positive effect on the pupils' learning. The use of assessment and the monitoring of teaching and learning require further strengthening.

HISTORY

172. The results of teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2000, where 69.5 per cent of pupils achieved Level 5 and above, are above national norms. In classes observed during the inspection, pupils' attainment was in line with national expectations, and achievement was satisfactory. Pupils handle historical facts well, and over the key stage they increase their ability to analyse and evaluate the key concepts of causation and effect. For example, Year 9 pupils, in their study of the domestic policy of Adolf Hitler, were able to set in chronological order diverse events such as the Enabling Act, the reduction in Germany's unemployment from six million to half a million, and the rebuilding of the German army. They were also able to evaluate the long-term effect of each event on Germany and upon the rest of the world. The discrepancy between the teacher assessment tests and standards across time reflects the low allocation of time to the subject in the first three years of secondary schooling.

173. At the end of Key Stage 4, standards of pupils' work are above, and sometimes well above, the standards achieved nationally. Pupils' progress is good, partly because learning through empathy is a strength at this stage. A Year 11 class, for example, was clearly moved at pictures of survivors of napalm bombing in Vietnam. Pupils are skilful at linking several facts together to make a comprehensive and cohesive historical picture. For example, Year 11 pupils, in their studies of the war in Vietnam, were able to show how the 'hit and run' guerrilla tactics of the Vietcong and the Tet offensive were not only military but psychological factors which led eventually to the American withdrawal. These standards are reflected in examinations results in 2000, when 76 per cent of pupils gained A*-C grades,

significantly above the national average. These results, which have been sustained over the last three years, are due to several factors. These are pupils' confidence when dealing with the complexities of analysis and evaluation in tests and examinations, and good strategies for achieving the best possible marks for coursework. The department is aware of the need to teach better strategies to help pupils retain facts.

174. Standards at the end of the Sixth Form, as observed from notebooks and in classes, are in line with the national standards. Students have an above-average grasp of the complexities of historical analysis. For example, Year 13 students can evaluate the responses of the different powers to the various crises of the cold war in the 1960's, which culminated in the establishment of the Berlin Wall, and they understand the complexities which led to the decisions taken. Results in A Level examinations, however, are only in line with the national average for the higher grades, while results over all grades are below average. This is because of students' lack of wider reading in the subject, and also because students do not retain information easily and have not developed independent research skills.

175. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 11. Good use is made of individual education plans. Higher attaining pupils make satisfactory progress, but could be stretched even further. There is no significant evidence to show that the variation between the achievements of boys and girls differs from the national pattern. The cohort of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is too small to enable any valid comparisons to be made.

176. Teaching is never less than satisfactory; it is good in nearly half of lessons and very good in a further quarter. Lessons are well planned and well prepared. Sometimes, teachers are inclined to be too didactic, rather than encouraging pupils' independent learning. A characteristic of the teaching is that teachers' enthusiasm is infectious and has a strong impact on pupils' learning. Teachers are particularly good at establishing good relationships, often using humour whilst always maintaining control. They are adept at drawing out significant points from challenging and exciting material. For example, a Year 10 lesson on the Treaty of Versailles set out to elicit students' understanding of the great powers' attitudes towards Germany. The teacher achieved this by using a famous Punch cartoon, depicting Clemenceau pulling the strings of the guillotine to 'kill' Germany in 1919. Pupils were stimulated by the challenge and applied their best intellectual and creative efforts, and learning was good.

177. Pupils enjoy this subject. They settle quickly to task and sustain concentration. They behave well and apply themselves to work with interest.

178. The department is led effectively and efficiently by the head of department, who is well supported by a team committed to encouraging pupils to high achievement. There has been marked improvement since the last inspection in the variety of teaching strategies, particularly in the extensive use of historical fieldwork. Examples were visits to the battlefield of Ypres, the local castle at Hedingham, and Auschwitz. A very good system of writing frames and key word lists underpins a good literacy programme. Wise choices have been made for GCSE and AS/A Level syllabuses which play to the strengths of the pupils.

179. The time allowed for history in Key Stage 3 is below recommendations. The study of such topics as the holocaust and the bombing of Vietnam allows history to make an important contribution to pupils' moral, social and cultural development. However, there is very little contribution to pupils' spiritual development. The assessment policy is based on sound principles and achievable outcomes, but there is inconsistency in teachers' marking according to National Curriculum levels. Pupils' progress is tracked well, but target-setting is not developed enough. Resources are satisfactory. There are good textbooks, videos and differentiated material, and good use is made of information and communications technology facilities. However, there are no artefacts, and insufficient reading materials.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

180. In Key Stage 3, where all pupils have timetabled information and communications technology lessons, attainment is in line with the national average. In lessons and work seen during the inspection, attainment improved as pupils made progress through the Key Stage, and, by Year 9, the attainment of a significant proportion of the year group is good. Pupils have some experience of all aspects of information and communications technology. In Year 7, they are able to use the Internet to good effect in finding information; they refine their searches as necessary and incorporate selected text and pictures into their word-processed documents. By Year 9 they have learnt how to use information and communications technology to control the cycles of electrical equipment, and can use desktop publishing software and spreadsheets. Results of teachers' assessments in 2000 are well above the national average, although attainment at the higher level is lower than in the previous year.

181. In Key Stage 4, there are no discrete information and communications technology lessons. Pupils have some opportunities to use the technology in some subjects, such as design and technology, English and geography. However, there are wide variations between departments, and between teachers, in the breadth, depth and frequency of its use. There is much more scope for using computers to enhance learning in most subjects. Where the technology is used, pupils do not have adequate opportunities to build upon the skills which they have acquired in Key Stage 3. Pupils do not develop the skills to enable them to use more complex functions, particularly for analysing and interpreting data. Attainment by age 16 is below average.

182. In the Sixth Form, where a great deal of autonomous use of the technology was seen, attainment is generally satisfactory, particularly in word processing and the use of the Internet for research, but data analysis is underdeveloped.

183. In all years, pupils have a positive attitude towards the use of computers. They are usually very well motivated, and work effectively in pairs and small groups with good levels of concentration and perseverance. This is particularly needed at times, because of problems with the new computer network. These are having an adverse effect on aspects of the use of the technology, despite the best efforts of the school to remedy the situation.

184. Teaching in almost all lessons in Key Stage 3 was good, and an example of very good teaching was seen. Lessons are well planned and in most cases classroom management is good.

Teachers support pupils well as they work at computers, and the pace is good. In a small minority of lessons, pupils would have made better progress if there had been some whole class teaching. In Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form, where information and communications technology was being used, teaching overall was good, though this did not usually include specific teaching of additional skills. In all years, many teachers do not adequately exploit the use of the technology in their lessons, although pupils are encouraged to use computers for homework and coursework.

185. Recent changes in the management of information and communications technology have brought about improvements in provision. A detailed development plan is in place, the infrastructure has been improved, and the number of modern computers has increased. The number of computers is now almost in line with the national average for a school of this size. The Internet is available throughout the school building. The development plan includes a short course GCSE for all pupils, which, when implemented, should help to ensure the development of information and communications technology skills and assessment procedures. The provision of information and communications technology was a Key Issue at the last inspection, and there is still no coherent, coordinated system for integrating the technology in all subjects. The impending New Opportunities Fund training for staff should provide them with skills and understanding of how to enhance learning in their subjects with the use of information and communications technology.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

186. Attainment at the age of 14 is in line with national expectations. Girls do considerably better than boys. Although standards have fallen in recent years, inspection evidence now indicates a slight improvement. Results in French in GCSE examinations in 2000 are well above the national average. Boys' results are further above the national average for boys than are girls' results compared to the national average for girls. Results have been inconsistent over the last three years. Spanish results are below average, although girls' results matched the national average for girls. Results have declined in recent years, but the number of pupils gaining A* or A grades was in line with the national average, and much improved compared with 1999. At GCE A Level, one in four students gained an A grade, though results overall were average.

187. Pupils in Key Stage 3 make satisfactory progress. They all study both French and Spanish in Years 7 and 8, and can choose to continue with either or both in Year 9. Time allocated to each language is low, and restricts the progress made by pupils studying both languages. Higher attaining pupils do not make adequate progress, but pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. By the end of Year 9, higher attaining pupils begin to apply tenses in their oral and written work, and have learned sufficient vocabulary and language structure to understand most of what they read and hear. Pronunciation and intonation are sometimes good, but not consistently so. Average and lower attaining pupils need a lot of support to produce language, but communicate brief information. They understand key details in short spoken and written messages. In oral work they depend heavily on the written word, either in the textbook or their own preparation, so that pronunciation is often anglicised. The content of written work is usually good, though length and accuracy vary according to ability. Listening skills are developed best, as pupils hear teachers use French and Spanish consistently to conduct lessons.

188. In Years 10 and 11, pupils continue to make satisfactory progress. Higher attaining pupils make good progress. These pupils are much more confident orally and converse well on familiar topics and more demanding issues, such as personal fitness and the environment. They use a range of tenses and give opinions. They understand extended texts. Most pupils in middle and lower ability groups make satisfactory progress. They improve their vocabulary and comprehension skills sufficiently to identify important points in messages. In some cases, oral and written work is of a low standard, conveying minimal information. This tends to reflect the level of effort and enthusiasm applied by these pupils. However, in 2000 all pupils gained at least a GCSE grade G, indicating that pupils with special educational needs make at least satisfactory progress. Evidence from GCSE modules already completed and accredited for pupils in Year 11 indicates an improvement in standards in Spanish.

189. There are currently few students in the Sixth Form studying modern languages. The quality of work seen during the inspection was variable. All students are making good progress, as they benefit from the small size of groups and the regular opportunity to participate in oral work. There is some very good work in Spanish in Year 12. Students rapidly improve the range of their active vocabulary, and a strong focus on grammar enables them to write and speak with increasing confidence, accuracy, and complexity on topics such as the National Front in France, bullfighting, cannabis use, and the socio-economic situation in Galicia. Comprehension skills also improve well, as they hear and read a wide range of materials, including texts on the Internet.

190. Attitudes are largely positive, although in Years 9 to 11 there is some frustration with the turnover in staffing. Though numbers in the Sixth Form are low, and no pupil in Year 10 takes two languages, there is evidence that both of these situations may change in the next academic year. Pupils take pride in the presentation and completion of their work. They collaborate sensibly in pair and group work. During the inspection, pupils could be trusted with a Treasure Hunt activity around the school unsupervised. Behaviour is good in most lessons, but some pupils are unwilling to participate and consequently make less progress than they should. Progress is also affected in a minority of lessons where behaviour is unacceptable.

191. Teaching is good in two thirds of lessons, including very good teaching in one in six lessons. It is stronger in Spanish than in French. Teaching was unsatisfactory or poor in two of the lessons seen. Teaching is not as good as during the previous inspection: to some extent this reflects current staffing difficulties. However, there is now more pair and group work. Teachers are committed and hard working. Most offer both French and Spanish to GCSE standard. They use the foreign language well. In the best lessons, pupils' learning is accelerated by a range of imaginative activities, covering different skills and conducted at a brisk pace. In a Year 10 Spanish lesson, pupils revised previous work through quick-fire questions, and learned new language for making a hotel reservation. They then applied and consolidated this through a listening task, and through speaking and writing tasks carried out with a partner. A Year 11 French lesson on environmental issues included oral pair work, listening and reading tasks and a dice game, all of which helped to embed new learning in an enjoyable way. Although lesson plans show an intention to provide work for the range of needs within groups, this rarely happens, and higher attaining pupils in mixed ability groups are not adequately extended. Teachers mostly manage pupils well. Relationships are good, and teachers use praise and encouragement, and a good deal of humour.

192. Marking is used well to inform pupils about their progress. Some teachers write full comments designed to provide clarification, and set targets for improvement against national criteria, which supports learning very effectively. Homework is set regularly and complements work done in class. In Years 10 to 13 it is often open-ended, so that pupils and students can show some initiative in their learning. In Years 7 to 9, all do the same homework, and opportunities to extend the more able are rarely taken.

193. In lessons where teaching is unsatisfactory or poor, this is largely because explanations are unclear, pace is slow and work unchallenging. Pupils become confused and frustrated, and make inadequate progress.

194. In the absence of the head of department, her deputy leads the department very capably and there is a strong team ethic as teachers cope with extra demands. Schemes of work are being re-written. Assessment procedures are good and data are used effectively to support learning, for example through target setting. However, the subject development plan has too many targets, which need prioritising. There are no strategies to improve boys' performance. No systematic monitoring of the work of the department has taken place, though there are plans to address this shortcoming. Regular trips and exchanges to France and Spain support pupils' learning. Although there are many positive features in the work of the current team, improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory, owing to poorer results and more inconsistent teaching, both of which stem from the problem of recruiting and retaining staff.

MUSIC

195. All pupils gained A*-C grades in GCSE examinations in 2000, which is well above the national average of 70 per cent. More pupils are achieving the highest grades. There is no significant difference between the results for girls and boys. The number of pupils choosing to study music in the Sixth Form has increased from previously very small numbers. It is not possible to make significant statistical comparisons because of the small numbers of students choosing the subject.

196. No teacher assessments of the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 were undertaken in 2000. The present teaching arrangements for pupils in Years 7 to 9 means that attainment by pupils who have lessons taught by cover and supply teachers is unsatisfactory, and much lower than that of other pupils. Observation of lessons and analysis of pupils' notebooks gives a mixed picture of attainment and achievement, which relates clearly to the quality of teaching. During the inspection 80 per cent of teaching for these pupils was unsatisfactory. The main reason for this was lack of pace and challenge during lessons. Temporary teachers do not have enough knowledge of music teaching to help pupils develop musical skills and understanding. Lessons are planned for supply and cover teachers, but are not always taught as planned. As a result, pupils spend too long on non-musical activities, such as completing worksheets and word searches, and their progress is unsatisfactory. Books are not marked regularly and work is not always appropriate for all pupils. The teaching by the permanent member of staff is good. Lessons are planned

effectively, and good demonstrations and support promote good learning. In these lessons, pupils are challenged to extend their compositions appropriately. Many play melodies fluently with good finger technique, and are able to add single finger chord patterns or drone accompaniments. Pupils can recognise and discuss the instruments playing in pieces of music. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in these lessons.

197. The standard of work at Key Stage 4 is generally in line with expectations. Written work is neatly presented, with appropriate use of musical vocabulary. Pupils perform with confidence for different audiences. The present staffing arrangements mean that not all pupils in Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form can be taught by the specialist teacher. However, extra lessons are provided during lunch times and after school, to address gaps in coverage. Lessons are planned effectively, with a clear focus for learning, and homework is set to reinforce work done in class. Pupils are questioned well to promote discussion. Pupils develop a variety of styles of composition, and they make good use of the recording facility on the keyboards. A duet for flutes showed the influence of imitation and canon as musical devices within the composition. One pupil derived inspiration from a favourite family holiday, another from an interest in Jazz.

198. Pupils' attitudes to the subject vary. Some are disillusioned by inadequate teaching, and no longer have much interest in lessons. Some pupils try to help themselves to make progress by using the musical knowledge and understanding gained from their instrumental lessons and the work they have done in primary schools. Relationships between examination pupils and staff are good, and these pupils have a positive and constructive attitude to the department. A number of extra-curricular activities take place, and these are well supported by pupils, who enjoy the opportunity to perform in concerts both in school and the local community. The number of pupils having instrumental lessons has remained high, with a variety of instruments taught. There are good procedures for monitoring attendance and progress. However, the accommodation provided for these lessons is unsatisfactory. The rooms are shabby, dingy and unkempt, and are a poor learning and teaching environment.

199. The sole specialist teacher is working very hard to keep the department running on a day-to-day basis in the absence of a head of department, and with no departmental structures. Lack of stability in the leadership of this department has resulted in many shortcomings in its management, and no vision or strategy for development. The department development plan has yet to be implemented. There is no overall scheme of work and no clear assessment criteria which link to National Curriculum levels. At present pupils are not aware, when composing, how they can improve their work. In lessons, time needs to be given for pupils to record their work in progress, in order to appraise and refine their compositions effectively. Reports to parents give limited information and none have been written for some pupils taught by cover and supply staff.

200. Since the last inspection the only area that has continued to improve is attainment in GCSE results. Key Stage 3 attainment is adversely affected by staff changes, lack of coherent planning and assessment procedures.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

201. The evidence from lessons observed shows that the standard of work attained by most pupils at the end of Year 9 conforms to the national average in all areas of the physical education curriculum. Most pupils are able to apply techniques, skills and competition rules to several aspects of the curriculum, including basketball, football, hockey and swimming. The majority of the pupils have sound basic skills, and a significant minority have very good skills. These provide a good platform for future development. In football, boys have sound individual control and passing skills, and good evaluation skills. Girls have good control and passing skills in basketball. In swimming, all pupils are confident in the water and use a range of recognised strokes. The ability of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 to observe and analyse performance is above national expectations. In this key stage, achievement is very good: in lessons during the inspection pupils always made good progress, and sometimes very good or excellent progress. Pupils are successfully encouraged to develop not only their skills but also an understanding of the techniques and rules. An example of excellent progress was observed in a Year 9 swimming lesson, where pupils not only developed their ability in the recognised strokes, but also made significant progress in the butterfly stroke, which, at the beginning of the lesson, most were not able to attempt.

202. GCSE results for physical education in 2000 are well above the national average, and show improvement on those of the previous year. GCSE dance results are also well above average. By the end of Key Stage 4, the attainment of other pupils is above the national average. Achievement in this key stage is very good. In a Year 11 GCSE dance lesson, girls demonstrated good quality of movement, and used their analysis of movement skills to improve their own performance and that of others in the group. They have developed sophisticated choreographic skills. In a GCSE physical education practical lesson on hockey, excellent passing and control skills were evident, while pupils once again were able to analyse performance, and apply skills to different game situations.

203. Results in A Level examinations are also above the national average, and students continue to show a good understanding of how to observe and analyse performance. The high standards in this subject are the result of the very high quality of teaching.

204. The attitudes of most pupils to learning are very positive. They are enthusiastic, well behaved, and co-operative, and show a real enjoyment of the subject. Most are attentive and able to sustain concentration. Relationships are good. Opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and to undertake different roles, such as coach or official, are developing.

205. The quality of teaching is at least good in nearly all lessons, and it is very good in a quarter and excellent in a further fifth. Teaching is never less than satisfactory. There is excellent teaching in both key stages, and in these lessons secure knowledge is regularly conveyed to pupils. This is achieved through the teacher's perceptive observation of performance, appropriate intervention, and good question and answer sessions. Planning is thorough, and incorporates varied teaching strategies and a sequence of activities which involves both individual and collaborative learning, often with an emphasis on pupils evaluating their own performance and that of others in the group. A significant factor is the exceptional enthusiasm, energy and vitality of all staff; pupils rarely fail to enjoy physical education lessons. Discipline and class management is also usually very good.

206. Assessment of performance during lessons by pupils and teachers is regularly used to enhance learning. However, although assessment is systematically recorded, and there is some target setting, teachers do not set targets for pupils which are linked to schemes of work, or involve pupils in the process. Nor is prior attainment consistently used to establish the potential for progress. The marking of GCSE and 'A' level work does not provide pupils with the information they need to improve.

207. The curriculum meets statutory requirements at both key stages, and the range of activities at Key Stage 4 provides a sound preparation for Post-16 leisure activities. The time allocated to pupils in Key Stage 4 is not adequate to teach the National Curriculum in appropriate depth, and Sixth Form students have limited access to physical education. There is too much emphasis on outdoor games activities in Key Stage 3. Staff provide a very good range of extra-curricular activities, and school teams compete very successfully with other schools in a range of sports. Many pupils achieve representative honours. The girls' under-16 hockey team has recently reached two national hockey finals.

208. The department is well led and organised, and communication within the department is very good. The head of department provides a clear educational direction and is very well supported by the whole team, though observation of teaching is not consistently used to monitor the effectiveness of the department. The close communication and mutual support within the department is a critical factor in its success. All staff are good role models, are committed, and give generously of their time. Accommodation is very good, and is a significant factor in the range of activities that can be offered to pupils. However, maintenance and cleaning of several areas in the department, most noticeably the changing rooms, is unsatisfactory and represents a health and safety hazard. There has been good progress in addressing issues raised in the last inspection report. There are now many opportunities for pupils to evaluate performance in lessons, although the department is still in process of developing pupils' opportunities for planning. A full range of teaching styles is now employed, and pupils of all abilities are now consistently challenged. With improved assessment practices, this should improve further.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

209. Attainment at the end of Year 9 is in line with expectations for 14 year olds. Pupils make satisfactory progress, and some make good progress through Years 7 to 9. There are good examples of pupils developing their knowledge and understanding of religious concepts, and of principles such as suffering and enlightenment. Students can relate what they are studying to their own experience. They make use of specialist language such as 'eucharist'. Students use text material and draw conclusions from it, such as the importance of bread and wine in different Christian celebrations. Students with special educational needs make appropriate progress, though not enough tasks adapted to their needs are always provided. Written work has improved since the last inspection.

210. There is no religious education for all students in Key Stage 4, although a GCSE course is offered and is currently taught to a small number of Year 10 pupils. Results in GCSE examinations in 2000 were above average. In lessons and work seen during the inspection, attainment in Year 10

reached expectations. Pupils are developing an understanding of religious concepts, and there are good signs that they are developing a problem solving approach. They show a good understanding of religious feasts and festivals, and are beginning to consolidate their learning and develop values. Generally, good progress is being made, although there is not enough emphasis on an analytical approach to develop abstract thinking.

211. In lessons and work seen during the inspection, attainment in the Sixth Form was found to be in line with expectations. Students demonstrate their ability to think analytically, and provide reasoned arguments based on sound knowledge. A good example is an analysis of the similarities and differences between Christian and Islamic teaching. Students handle conceptual and philosophical issues well, for example the concept of revelation. Students are able to present balanced arguments, and they have a sound approach to research. A Level results were average in 2000 and AS Level results were above average.

212. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good and sometimes very good. They behave well and apply themselves to work. There was evidence of good collaboration in the group work observed on religious festivals. A good rapport exists between pupils and teachers, and teachers give good support to individuals.

213. Teaching is nearly always at least satisfactory, and it is good in half of lessons, with an example of very good teaching. Teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory in only one lesson.

214. Teachers are qualified specialists, secure in their knowledge of the subject, and they display confidence in the use of material and resources. Planning is good and lesson aims are shared with pupils, placing the lesson firmly in the context of prior learning. Teachers make good use of questioning to consolidate current learning and to review previous work. They use a suitable range of styles that help pupils to maintain their interest and develop understanding of religious principles and concepts. Resources are well used, especially worksheets prepared for students with different needs. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour well. Extension work and homework are used to good effect. Assessment of pupils' work is generally satisfactory and helpful comments are written in exercise books. Although the procedure provides a sound basis for assessing what pupils know and understand, it does not inform the teaching and learning cycle and the planning of new work. The department does not set detailed targets, against which it can assess pupils' progress.

215. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is broad and balanced and meets the needs of the students. It satisfies the requirements of the local Agreed Syllabus, and schemes of work are appropriate. The GCSE course is taught to a small number of Year 10 students, and religious education is taught to A and AS Level. However, statutory requirements are not met for religious education for all pupils in Years 10 and 11, or for Sixth Form students. This was a Key Issue when the school was last inspected, and nothing has been done since then to provide religious education.

216. The department is well managed, with a clear sense of purpose and direction. The head of department is well supported by an enthusiastic team. Syllabus material does make provision for spiritual and moral development. There are opportunities for pupils to respond to religious beliefs and experiences, but fewer chances for reflection. The department is well organised, and planning is

good, though monitoring the work of the department is not adequately carried out at present. The development plan addresses priorities and forms a sound basis for future action.