

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **BIRKDALE HIGH SCHOOL**

Southport

LEA area: Sefton

Unique reference number: 104954

Headteacher: Marcus Barker

Reporting inspector: Terence Parish  
15465

Dates of inspection: 5<sup>th</sup> - 9<sup>th</sup> March 2001

Inspection number: 211963

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 - 16

Gender of pupils: Boys

School address: Birkdale High School  
Windy Harbour Road  
Southport

Postcode: PR8 3DT

Telephone number: 01704 577253

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Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr David Jones

Date of previous inspection: 14<sup>th</sup> April 1997

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
15465	Terence Parish	Registered inspector		<p>What sort of school is it?</p> <p>How well are pupils taught?</p> <p>How well is the school led and managed?</p> <p>What should the school do to improve further?</p>
13786	S. Walsh	Lay inspector		<p>Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development.</p> <p>How well does the school care for its pupils?</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
22685	N. Moss	Team inspector	<p>English</p> <p>Media Studies</p> <p>English as an additional language</p>	
18967	B. Loydell	Team inspector	Mathematics	
20729	J. Berry	Team inspector	Science	
13066	M. Harrison	Team inspector	<p>Art and design</p> <p>Special educational needs</p>	
21806	P. Swinnerton	Team inspector	Design and technology	
11300	B. Smith	Team inspector	Geography	
31191	D. Sylph	Team inspector	History	
27803	J Clarke	Team inspector	<p>Information and communication technology</p> <p>Religious education</p> <p>Equal Opportunities</p>	

1288	D. Barraclough	Team inspector	Modern languages	
23308	J. Morrell	Team inspector	Music	
8329	G. Salter-Smith	Team inspector	Physical education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Birkdale is an 11 - 16 comprehensive school for boys. The number of pupils on roll, 863, is about average. It is well thought of by parents and is oversubscribed. Though varied, the socio-economic background of pupils is generally good. Almost all pupils are white. A very small number of pupils have English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils identified as having special educational needs is below average. The number of pupils with statements of need is above average. The overall attainment of pupils on entry to the school is average, though about a third are above this. The school has earned 'Beacon' status and this recognises some of the particular strengths it has.

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

This is a good school with some very significant strengths. The headteacher, appointed in September 2000, is a very good leader and an exemplary teacher. His management is very effective and he is very well supported by the deputy headteacher. Good management and good teaching have maintained pupils' standards of work above average. Pupils learn well. Pupils' behaviour, attitudes and relationships are very good. Their attendance is well above average. The school is provided with a little less money than most similar schools and consequently gives good value for money.

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

- Pupils' overall standards of attainment in English, geography, modern languages and physical education are particularly high and often well above average.
- The proportion of pupils attaining A\*-A grades at GCSE is higher than average in many subjects and very high in English language, English literature and French.
- Standards of attainment in mathematics and science, by the end of Year 9, are well above average.
- Pupils' moral and personal development are very good.
- Extra-curricular sporting opportunities are excellent.
- Teaching of physical education, media studies and literacy skills is very good.
- Promotion and monitoring of pupils' behaviour, attitudes and personal relationships are very good.
- Careers education is excellent.
- Support for new teachers and for students training to be teachers is excellent.

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

- Pupils' standards of attainment: in music and art and design by the end of Year 9, and in religious education by the end of Year 9 and Year 11.
- The achievement of about 10 per cent of middle attaining pupils in science at GCSE.
- The curriculum for: art and design; drama; design and technology; music; and vocational education.
- The computer skills acquired by the third of pupils who do not follow GCSE information communication technology (ICT) and the monitoring and reporting of their progress.

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

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in April 1997. Since then: academic standards have been maintained rather than improved. Attendance has improved and pupils' attitudes are better. They undertake more independent work, particularly in the use of ICT. There is a higher proportion of good and particularly very good teaching, but also some unsatisfactory teaching. Issues raised in the last report have not all been satisfactorily resolved; some are raised again in this report. There is still insufficient time, at Key Stage 4, for the agreed syllabus in religious education. Assessment of ICT capability in Key Stage 4, for pupils not following a GCSE, is not secure. Art and design, drama and music remain relatively weak in the school curriculum and in extra-curricular work. On balance, improvement is satisfactory. Under the leadership of the new headteacher, and with improved strategic planning, the school has the capacity to resolve outstanding issues.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE.

Performance in:	compared with				Key	
	all schools			similar schools		
	1998	1999	2000	2000	well above average	A
					above average	B
					average	C
GCSE examinations	C	C	C	B	below average	D
					well below average	E

In 2000, the proportion of boys who attained five or more A\*-C grades was above average whilst the proportion that attained five or more A\*-G grades was below average. This dip in A\*-G seems to be a 'one-off'; it does not reflect the historical pattern of results. However, whilst standards have been maintained, the national trend has been one of sustained improvement and Birkdale's 2000 results are closer to average than they were several years ago. Statutory targets for 1999 and 2000 have not been reached; this is, in part, due to targets being too high too soon. Standards can rise further and are likely to, given the well above average test results at the end of Year 9 in 2000 and the changes beginning to take place in the school.

Standards of work seen are most often above average. They are below average at the end of Year 9 in art and design and music. They are below average at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 in religious education. Standards in English and physical education overall, science and mathematics by the end of Year 9, and French, Spanish and geography by the end of Year 11, are particularly strong. Overall, pupils achieve well by the end of Year 9 and Year 11 and pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. The boys are well motivated and work hard.



Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Good manners predominate and almost all pupils behave very well in lessons. Exclusion rates are very low.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between boys and between boys and staff are very good. Personal development is very good.
Attendance	Very good. Pupils in all years attend well and arrive in school on time.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

One hundred and sixty five lessons were seen. Almost three-quarters were good or better and a third were very good or excellent. Ninety five per cent were satisfactory or better. Unsatisfactory lessons occurred in art and design, music, English and science. However, on balance, teaching is good in English with many lessons being very good or excellent. It is good in mathematics. In science, teaching is good in Key Stage 3 and satisfactory in Key Stage 4. Teaching is very good in physical education overall and in geography at Key Stage 3. Teaching is good in most other subjects. It is satisfactory in art and design, religious education and music. Both art and design and music teaching are affected adversely by not following Curriculum 2000 at Key Stage 3. Religious education teaching has insufficient time in Key Stage 4. Teaching of literacy is well done, particularly in Year 7 literacy lessons, and numeracy is well taught in mathematics and several subject areas. Overall, teachers manage pupils very well and have very good command of their subjects.

Pupils learn well, acquiring knowledge and working at a good pace. Most work hard, show a lot of interest and enquiry, and want to do well. In Key Stage 3 they need to be even better informed about what to do to improve. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall, better when supported by additional staff in lessons. Gifted and talented pupils are well catered for in some areas through 'Master Classes' at weekends and holidays. The very few pupils with English as an additional language have satisfactory provision and make correspondingly sound progress.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	COMMENT
The quality and range of the curriculum	Personal education is good, careers education excellent. Extra-curricular opportunities are good. Art, ICT, music, and religious education curricula are not meeting statutory requirements. Design and technology uses too narrow a range of materials.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory overall. Within the special educational needs department it is very good. Currently few accredited courses other than GCSE.
Provision for pupils with	Satisfactory. There are currently very few pupils in this category.

English as an additional language	None exhibit any special needs.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Good personal education. Insufficient co-ordination of spiritual and cultural development. Greater involvement of pupils in drama and music is needed. Social development is good and moral development very good. The boys can be trusted.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Satisfactory overall. Very strong on promoting good behaviour and attendance. Generally satisfactory in monitoring and supporting academic progress. Pupils' targets for improvement need sharpening.

The school has good links with parents.

### HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The new headteacher is a very good leader, already showing some excellent management traits that should take the school onwards and upwards. The deputy headteacher provides very good support. Middle management across the school is generally good.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good overall. They have many strengths, chief of which is recognition that the school needed a shift in direction. The curriculum, however, does not fully meet requirements and did not do so at the last inspection.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school is aware of its strengths and weaknesses and now has strategies in place to either build on the former or reduce the latter.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The budget is well managed and opportunities to seek 'Best Value' are taken. Teachers are inefficiently used to support pupils with special educational needs in the classroom. Staffing, accommodation and learning resources are satisfactory overall.

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

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress sons make.</li> <li>• Behaviour in school.</li> <li>• Teaching.</li> <li>• Expectations of work.</li> <li>• Leadership and management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homework provision.</li> <li>• Information about son's progress.</li> <li>• Working relationship with parents.</li> </ul>

The inspection team agree with the gist of most parents' views. However, pupils' progress in some areas can be improved; there is a small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching; homework is good in many subjects, but not consistently so. The annual reports to parents

need to say more about pupils' progress. The school is more than happy to work with parents.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

1. When pupils enter the school, at the start of Year 7, their attainment is average compared to all pupils, boys and girls, nationally. This indicates that there is a small skew towards above average if the attainment of boys only is considered. Inspection evidence suggests about a third of Year 7 boys have above average attainment and about a quarter below average attainment, confirming statistical data.
2. In 2000, the average GCSE point score of boys at Birkdale was average when compared to pupils in all schools and above average when compared to boys' national results. This is a fair reflection, as the boys who took GCSE at Birkdale in 2000 were 'average' statistically. In other words, the boys who left in 2000 achieved well overall, indicating good progress between starting at the school and leaving it. If GCSE grades are considered the picture is a little more complex. Year 2000 results show a significant difference between the results likely to be expected of the most able boys and the rest. Compared with all schools, the proportion of pupils at Birkdale who attained five or more grades between A\* and C was above average; the proportion who attained five or more grades between A\* and G below average; and the proportion who attained one or more grades at A\* to G, well below average. If results are compared with prior attainment, based on end of Year 9 tests in 1998, the picture is a little worse: five or more A\*-C grades becomes average; five or more A\*-G grades well below average, and one or more A\*-G grades very low. This relatively poor performance of middle and lower attaining boys appears not to be typical; their performance was better in the four preceding years and much better in 1999. The school has offered reasons for the dip in 2000, including identifying boys who were counted statistically, but in fact were not present during examinations. Inspectors reviewed this evidence and analysed each subject's performance in more detail. They concluded that the school's argument is correct, though there is room for improvement in several subject areas. The school is taking action to ensure the dip does not happen again.
3. End of Year 9 tests, the 'SAT' tests, were mentioned above. These give an indication of the progress pupils have made between entering the school and the end of Year 9. In 2000, the boys at Birkdale did outstandingly well. Their overall performance was well above average. In English tests they were well above average, and in science and mathematics they were amongst the top five per cent of pupils nationally. As this performance is used as a national benchmark against which future GCSE performance is measured, GCSE results at Birkdale in 2001 should also be well above average, at least. The school's trend in SAT test results is broadly in line with the national trend. They have kept well above national results for four years and, generally, risen slightly as the national ones have. 1998 and 2000 results were particularly high. English test results tend to be relatively lower than mathematics or science but English results at GCSE are better, indicating pupils achieve more successfully in English by the end of Year 11.
4. The trend in overall GCSE performance at Birkdale is below the national trend. The average GCSE points score at Birkdale has not changed much since 1997, whilst the national picture has improved significantly. So, although standards have been maintained at least above average, the difference between Birkdale's results and national results has narrowed. Both will become the same unless predictions based

on SAT results become a reality. To maintain its position, the school has to do better between the end of Year 9 and the end of Year 11.

5. The school does very well in the A\*-A end of the GCSE spectrum, particularly in English language and literature, French, geography and history (though history involves relatively small numbers). French loses some potentially weaker candidates, as they are not entered. English literature enters many pupils, but not all. Geography is an option, but a successful one; it does well right across the range of grades. Mathematics has done very well moving pupils from the E, F, G, grade area into D and, especially, C. There is scope for more B, A and A\* grades. Science needs to move pupils upwards all along the range of grades, so that there are fewer grades from D-G. Design and technology enters most pupils for GCSE, but not all; potentially weaker candidates are, significantly, not entered. Boys that are entered generally attain well above average results. ICT entered about a third of pupils for GCSE and their performance was well above average. However, it is impossible to determine the attainment in ICT of the majority of pupils who were not entered. Though statutory, neither assessment nor reporting on their attainment was carried out in 2000.
6. Other subjects entered relatively fewer pupils for examinations, as they are options and not so popular as those above. However, it is possible to compare performance in these subjects with their performance in others. Significantly under-performing are art and design and physical education. The latter is an anomaly as grade analysis shows pupils attained well above the national average, all passed, and did particularly well in the A\*-B range. This anomaly is due to the fact that boys taking GCSE physical education do it as an extra subject and generally do very well in all their other examinations. Performance in art and design is genuinely below where it should be and reflects the below average attainment in art at the end of Year 9. Business education results were also lower than other results in 2000. Inspection of this area of the curriculum was brief; it did not reveal any underlying reasons. The curriculum offered for business education is significantly changing from September 2000. Music is not reflected in any statistics, as the numbers of pupils taking it are small. Their attainment in GCSE is well above average. However, attainment in music at the end of Year 9 is generally below average, significantly because of inadequate time and an unsatisfactory curriculum. This does not encourage more pupils making the choice to take music, or taking it as an extra as they do physical education. Pupils also did relatively less well in science, design and technology, history and mathematics than in English, French, geography, and ICT. The reason why is indicated in the previous paragraph. In addition, history enters small numbers for GCSE examination and, though doing well at the top, had a significant 'tail' at the bottom too.
7. The schools' statutory targets for GCSE performance in 2000, agreed with the local education authority, were not reached and, in fact, fell well short of them. The targets are significantly higher than the consistent performance the school has shown over four years. The targets for 2000 were also increased above the 1999 targets, which were also not met. Whilst the inspection team agrees that there is room to improve the school results further, this does take time; the current targets should be exceeded within two years, given current pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 and proposed changes to the curriculum. Constantly increasing targets that are not met does not promote a 'success' culture.
8. In English, pupils achieve well by the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Their progress is rapid from when they enter school with broadly average attainment. Higher attaining pupils are challenged well, and pupils with special educational needs also make good progress because of good relationships with teachers. Pupils can read fluently and

write thoughtfully and with understanding. They can also speak with good expression and coherently. In mathematics pupils achieve well overall by the end of Year 9, though test results last year were very high, and satisfactory by the end of Year 11. The wide range of prior attainment in classes hampers pupils' progress in Year 7, though pupils with special educational needs achieve well when withdrawn into small groups. Pupils in Years 10 and 11, of middle and low prior attainment, are less motivated and lose impetus to their work. Higher attaining pupils make much better progress, though there is scope for greater recognition of excellence within lessons and for more high grades at GCSE. Algebra is of a high standard throughout the school. In science, pupils achieve well by the end of Year 9, despite the very mixed experiences and attainment they start with in Year 7. Test results were very high last year and standards in class seem similar. Practical work is of a particularly high standard. By the end of Year 11 achievement in science is satisfactory overall, but unsatisfactory for some middle attaining pupils. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress overall, good if supported specifically by an adult.

9. In art and design, pupils' achievements are unsatisfactory by the end of Year 9. They lack some expected skills; this is, in part, due to insufficient consideration of what they can or cannot do when they enter school in Year 7. By the end of Year 11 achievement is satisfactory as they make better progress in meeting GCSE requirements, but their attainment is below that in other subjects. In design and technology, pupils achieve well by the end of Year 9 and Year 11. They produce good practical work, but in a limited range of materials. Their progress in writing and presentation skills in Key Stage 4 is not as good as progress in practical work, and their attainment is below what it ought to be.
10. In geography, pupils achieve well by the end of Year 9 and Year 11. They know basic geographical skills early on and use ICT well to pursue enquiries, for example about flooding. When older, they use these skills to produce well thought out investigations. Energetic, well-planned teaching supports high attainment. In history, pupils achieve well by the end of Year 9 and satisfactorily by the end of Year 11. In Years 7 to 9 pupils are particularly enthusiastic and develop a good grasp of historical terminology. In Year 11 the standard of writing about historical events is very good, but some analytical work is less well developed.
11. In ICT pupils achieve well by the end of Year 9. Those that do a GCSE course also achieve well. It is not possible to determine how well others are doing overall, but it is evident that many have some skills that they use to help them in other subjects. By the end of Year 9 most pupils are confident users of computers and have a good base of essential knowledge and skills. GCSE pupils can apply ICT to solve problems drawn from real situations.
12. In both French and Spanish, pupils achieve well across all years, though there is a range between satisfactory and very good achievement in Key Stage 4. Gifted pupils achieve highly due to very good support, whilst pupils with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily. Pupils learn fast and have confidence in speaking the languages.
13. In music, achievement by the end of Year 9 is unsatisfactory due significantly to insufficient time allocation. More able and gifted pupils are insufficiently provided for. Work in Year 8 is more diverse and closer to expectations at that age. The few pupils in Years 10 and 11 achieve satisfactorily and attain good standards.

14. In physical education, pupils achieve very well by the end of Year 9 and continue to do well by the end of Year 11. By the end of Year 9 they can plan complex strategies in games and put them in practice. Standards in gymnastics are high. By the end of Year 11 they can analyse performance very well indeed. GCSE pupils use ICT well for research purposes.
15. In religious education, achievement is unsatisfactory by the end of Years 9 and 11. By the end of Year 9 pupils have some knowledge about a number of religions, but do not understand what they have in common and why they differ. By the end of Year 11 they still have only a poor understanding of key features of major world religions, including Christianity. Insufficient time contributes to this unsatisfactory achievement.

### **Literacy**

16. There are, in most subjects, good examples of writing for a variety of purposes across the curriculum. Good, substantial writing is evident at all levels in English, the humanities and science subjects, particularly throughout Key Stage 4. Written work is increasingly characterised throughout the school by improved spelling, sentence structure and grammar. At Key Stage 3, many pupils already present work well and write at length. At Key Stage 4, the majority of pupils can read for research and gist, and summarise points well.
17. Speaking and listening skills are well developed at all stages, with teachers working hard at providing good role models for formal register and appropriate styles of speech. Almost all pupils are able to argue and debate in an articulate fashion. There are examples across all subjects of pupils listening to and engaging in technical language when in classroom situations, for example in science, mathematics and English. Pupils learn to express their ideas fluently and thoughtfully in their writing, using an increasingly wider vocabulary. The school stresses these skills and is successful in attaining high levels of competence in them.
18. Reading in lessons is often good or very good, though a small proportion of pupils read aloud with too little expression, thus inhibiting full comprehension. Pupils generally read well for comprehension and are able to note and understand different styles employed for different purposes. Scanning skills are well developed and the skills of reading for understanding are generally good.

### **Numeracy**

19. Standards of numeracy are good on the whole, although problems can occur as pupils progress through the school when less emphasis is placed on regular practice of mental and written methods of calculation. In Key Stage 4 some teachers tend to assume that numeracy is established; they tend to neglect consolidation of such knowledge and understanding. Lack of confidence by some lower ability pupils may affect their performance, especially when told of predicted low GCSE grades from an early stage. In physical education GCSE theory lessons, when investigating recovery rates after exercise, pupils can use and interpret line graphs and understand formulae for rates of fitness. In all years in science, pupils can use line graphs, bar and pie charts and use measuring instruments correctly. In geography, pupils use number well. Teachers take some care to ensure that pupils understand the numeracy part of lessons and pupils can use co-ordinates and construct graphs of all types, including flood hydrographs. In design and technology, a Year 10 low ability group was observed having difficulties converting a recipe in imperial measures into metric, but could measure accurately.

### **Special Educational Needs**

20. By the ages of 14 and 16, pupils with special educational needs are making satisfactory progress overall in relation to their prior attainment. In some subjects they achieve well and make good progress, for example in English, ICT lessons and design and technology at both key stages and in mathematics at Key Stage 3. In physical education they make very good progress in both key stages. When withdrawn from class, or taught in sets by the special needs co-ordinator or support teachers, pupils in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 make good progress overall and sometimes very good progress. Without any learning support assistants to help, pupils make satisfactory progress overall in both key stages. Some pupils, with specific behavioural problems, have support from a learning support assistant. A number of classes have support from support teachers. A number of pupils with special educational needs entered various GCSE examinations in 2000, and achieved some success.

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

21. Pupils' have very good attitudes to school. They are very well motivated and work hard. They want to succeed. Most pupils are very confident. They are keen to answer questions and listen carefully to the contributions of others. Even if a lesson is rather boring, most pupils still try hard. A minority of older, middle to lower attaining pupils occasionally lose interest, but this results in them gazing into space or fiddling around rather than any deliberate misbehaviour.
22. Pupils work well within groups. There is good co-operation and collaboration. Year 9 pupils were extremely interested in a career lesson that prepared them for choosing their GCSE options. Groups of pupils were asked to consider the relative value of a variety of GCSE subjects when applying to pursue a range of different careers. They were able to organise themselves very well and take part in extremely well considered discussion with the minimum of supervision. Pupils with special educational needs generally respond well in lessons. When they are taught or supported by the special educational needs co-ordinator or support teachers, individually, in small groups, or in sets, their response is excellent. For example, a small group of Year 7 pupils worked extremely hard when working on 'caring for pets'.
23. Pupils behave very well when they are moving around the school. Corridors are very crowded but there is the minimum of pushing or jostling. The pupils have good manners and are very smartly dressed. Behaviour in the classroom is also very good. Unacceptable behaviour is very rare. There are a handful of pupils who do not always behave sensibly. When these pupils misbehave they are quickly removed from the classroom and placed in an isolation room where they continue their work. This ensures that there is the minimum of disruption to the lesson and that all pupils can continue to learn. Exclusion rates are very low. The number of fixed term exclusions has declined since the introduction of a new, inclusive behaviour policy. This has a clearly defined, staged response to behaviour problems. Physical bullying is very rare. Some younger pupils indulge in name calling, but teachers always try to nip this sort of behaviour in the bud.
24. Most pupils are enthusiastic about school, though a small number of parents' questionnaires indicated their sons do not seem to like school. Pupils are very interested and involved in school activities. There is tremendous participation in the very large number of extra-curricular sporting activities. During the inspection there



was a Year 7 inter-form KWIK-cricket tournament and there were many Year 7 pupils present, either taking part or good naturedly cheering on their form mates.

25. Attendance is very good; at 94.1 per cent attendance and below average unauthorised absence, attendance is well above the national average. Attendance has improved since the last inspection; this is associated with the introduction of a rapid response to absenteeism. Pupils generally arrive at school on time.
26. Relationships are very good, both between pupils and between teachers and pupils. This allows pupils to feel comfortable and confident. Pupils can express their views in lessons such as religious education and English literature and be confident that other pupils will be tolerant and understanding.
27. Pupils react very well to opportunities to show initiative or take on responsibility. The majority of Year 11 pupils become prefects; a small number are chosen to be team leaders and are encouraged to organise and supervise other prefects. Prefects take their duties very seriously and make an important contribution to the smooth running of the school. Many pupils are involved in raising money for charity. During inspection, Year 10 pupils were raffling a cricket bat to raise money for a major heart charity. There are many opportunities for personal development in physical education lessons and in extra-curricular sports. For example, during the Year 7 cricket tournament, a pupil was responsible for keeping the scores. In physical education lessons pupils are often given responsibility for their own learning. They lead warm up sessions and analyse their own performance and the performance of others. Some evening events are managed by pupils. The care a significant number of pupils take of plants around the school is wonderful. There is a school council and each form sends a representative. Younger pupils value the school council but older pupils feel it does not give them an adequate voice.

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

28. Teaching is good in Years 7 to 11. The high proportion, one third, of very good or better teaching outweighs the small amount of unsatisfactory teaching. Unsatisfactory teaching is more significant in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11. Unsatisfactory lessons were observed in music, art and design, English and science.
29. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subjects is very good and allows pupils to acquire skills, knowledge and understanding well. Coupled with good teaching of basic skills, such as literacy, pupils are able to make good progress in their lessons. Teachers plan lessons well and generally have high expectations of pupils' work. Expectations do vary, and this shows up in the eventual attainment of pupils. In most lessons, high expectations lead to pupils working hard and quickly. Pupils' willingness to work hard is supported by teachers' very good management of them, so that they can get on with their work without distractions. Pupils show considerable interest in their work, particularly in Key Stage 3 and in English in all years. Their ability to work independently, or with little direction from teachers, is variable but appears to be increasing, particularly when they can use ICT. The use of ICT for research, presentation and, increasingly, communication, is commendable given that many pupils have to manage for themselves from the end of Year 8, when formal lessons in ICT finish. Teachers' use of time in lessons is generally good though a few lessons drag. Resources, such as books, equipment and computers, are used well by teachers when available, but computers are not readily available in some subjects and books are sometimes old, as in design and technology. Good use of resources helps to break lessons up and provides more opportunities for a variety

of tasks, so maintaining the interest of pupils. Very good use is made of scientific equipment in Key Stage 3 science, leading to high standards of practical skills. Classroom support staff are very limited in number; they are used effectively when available, as in modern languages, where standards are high. Teachers used in a support capacity for pupils with special educational needs are also effective. Teachers' marking and day-to-day intervention in the classroom to support pupils are good. Marking enables pupils to know reasonably well how well they are doing in Years 7 to 9 and gives them some guidance on how to proceed. However, assessment data and National Curriculum levels of attainment are not used well enough, so pupils do not know exactly what they must do to improve or how to help themselves. Homework is generally set well by teachers, but there is some variation both between subjects and between teachers.

30. On balance, teaching is good in English. Lessons ranged from unsatisfactory to excellent. However, in two lessons in three, teaching was very good or better. The best lessons have high expectations, clear objectives and provide very good advice and support to pupils. There is a variety of activities and pupils are interested and well motivated, and they rise to the challenges. In unsatisfactory lessons work does not suit the range of prior attainment found in classes, with consequent loss of interest and slow rate of progress. Occasionally this leads to quite different, unsatisfactory attitudes, by some pupils. High quality lessons are taught in media studies where the expertise of the teacher inspires pupils. Teaching is good in mathematics: a third of lessons seen were very good. Regular assessment is used well to set the work provided to the needs of pupils. Many pupils in the middle-attaining band have been moved upwards by the time they take GCSE. Teaching in science is good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Most lessons begin with a review of the previous lesson and end with a recap on what has just been done. Together with effective management this allows pupils to build up a sound knowledge base and understand experimental enquiry. However, weaker lessons guide pupils too much, rather than providing a degree of challenge, are not clear about the learning intentions, and are too teacher dominated so pupils are not so interested. Marking is satisfactory but individual pupils are insufficiently monitored and supported.
31. Teaching in art and design is satisfactory. However, there is a significant amount of unsatisfactory teaching where the teacher talks for too long and the time available for practical work is cut too short. Attainment is partly below average because pupils have an insufficient range of skills at an appropriate depth. Good teaching is brisk and pupils are involved in their work. Teaching in design and technology is good. Good subject knowledge, good use of display to show standards of work that are expected, and efficient use of time promote good learning and good relationships between pupils and teachers.
32. Teaching in geography is good or very good in all lessons seen. Energy, enthusiasm and humour keep pupils interested; high expectations keep all pupils working at a good pace; good questioning ensures they learn well and achieve high standards. Teaching in history is good. Effective planning, good management of group work, clear objectives and tight control of time move pupils along, and they generally learn well. Particularly good teaching of writing skills, and good marking and feedback to pupils about what they have written, each contribute to good progress. A few lessons need to be more lively and make better use of resources.
33. Teaching of ICT is good; very good subject knowledge is a significant strength. Pupils are managed very well; this extends to the substantial work done outside lessons, before and after school and at lunch times. Very good use is made of new projectors

that enable the teacher to demonstrate screen techniques more effectively. Teaching of French and Spanish is good, with a high proportion of very good lessons in Key Stage 4. Teachers' planning is a real strength, providing challenging work and a variety of activities. Pace is very good in classes where pupils' attainment is very similar. Where it is substantially different, pace slows as the teacher supports or challenges different individuals.

34. On balance, teaching in music in Year 7 to 9 is satisfactory. However, there is a significant amount of unsatisfactory teaching where pupils are insufficiently challenged to do their best. Elements of Key Stage 3 lessons towards the end of the inspection week were very good. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is good. Teaching is better because of the involvement of pupils and the effectiveness of the teaching strategies used.
35. Teaching of physical education is very good in all years and there is some excellent teaching. Very high expectations and excellent relationships with pupils, plenty of variety and pace, effective questioning, and use of homework and ICT are amongst the attributes of physical education teachers that many other teachers could learn from.
36. Teaching in religious education is satisfactory. Good use is made of visual aids to bring the subject to life. Too much time is sometimes spent talking. Insufficient use is made of ICT. Written resources are poor: there are no textbooks.

### **Literacy**

37. In Year 7, a unit of work devoted to literacy is taught. Two of these lessons were observed, both of very high quality, and it was clear that the purpose of the course, to focus on and improve research methods, note-taking and information retrieval skills, is having a very beneficial impact on the level of literacy skills in this year group. Lessons ensure a concentration on all aspects of language, discussion, comprehension, oral work and individual and group writing tasks. The programme of study is delivered by teachers from a range of departments, including the headteacher, and is successfully promoting cross-curricular literacy skills.

### **Numeracy**

38. Number skills are well taught by the mathematics department, especially in Key Stage 3. Mental mathematics 'starters' and games are being introduced using National Numeracy Framework strategies from Year 7. Good examples of teachers reinforcing pupils' numeracy skills were seen in art and design, where pupils were required to use geometric grids to enlarge shapes and develop ideas for composition within a circle. In physical education, teachers plan opportunities to develop pupils' numeracy within every activity in the schemes of work. Modern language teachers ensure pupils deal with weights, measures and time consistently, and incorporate graphs from surveys into pupils' work. Teachers of ICT incorporate number skills well, especially when teaching about spreadsheets.

### **Special Educational Needs**

39. The quality of teaching and support provided by the special educational needs co-ordinator and the support teachers is very good overall. Where teaching is very good, teachers use praise appropriately and plan challenging, structured work. They give pupils targets that can be achieved in a short time, have a calm and peaceful working

atmosphere, manage pupils very well, and teach at a brisk pace. Pupils respond well by working hard and concentrating on their tasks. Their behaviour and relationships are excellent; as a result they achieve very well and learn new skills. When teaching is good, teachers have a sense of humour, their subject knowledge is good and they assess pupils as they visit each one. Appropriate homework is set. Some targets are effective, but many are too generalised. They are not small enough, achievable or timed, and do not enable pupils to experience frequent success. Targets are usually reviewed once a year.

40. There are no classroom assistants employed to provide in-class support for pupils with learning difficulties. This has an adverse effect on the progress that some pupils make. For example, in a Year 8 history lesson where several pupils with statements of special educational need needed extra adult help, there was no extra support available for the teacher. Support teachers provide some in-class support, mainly in Year 7. There is one learning support assistant employed to support pupils with behavioural difficulties.
41. The quality of teaching is less effective when teachers have to plan work consistently for all the pupils in their class, including pupils with special educational needs who have individual education plans. The quality of this type of teaching is inconsistent and pupils are not always sufficiently challenged. A number of good, short-term targets were seen in use, including those in a Year 7 mathematics lesson and a Year 11 science lesson. In physical education, teachers are very aware of pupils' needs. They keep detailed notes on pupils' progress and use appropriately adapted equipment. This enables all pupils to take part in the lessons.

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

42. Since the last inspection the length of the school day has increased to 25 hours. A two-week timetable operates effectively on the whole. Some subjects, such as music in Years 7 to 9 and religious education in Years 10 and 11, suffer difficulties in continuity when they have just one lesson every two weeks. This does reduce the progress they might make and contributes to unsatisfactory standards of work in these subjects.
43. The quality and range of learning opportunities offered by the school is satisfactory overall. Strengths are found in the strategies for teaching literacy and numeracy skills, the provision of careers education and guidance, the personal and social education programme, extra-curricular sport, and the provision for gifted and talented pupils. All these areas lead to many pupils achieving high standards. Equality of access and opportunity to the learning activities provided is satisfactory. Pupils have equal access to the range of subjects offered, but the courses are not always well matched to their needs, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
44. The breadth, balance and range of subjects taught to pupils in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory; the appropriate statutory curriculum is not in place. The key issue arising from the last inspection, to give more emphasis to providing pupils with more experiences in cultural and aesthetic activities, has not been given sufficient attention.
45. In Years 7 to 9 all the subjects of the National Curriculum are taught, plus personal, social, and health education, together with citizenship. In Year 7, literacy is taught very effectively as part of English. Around one third of Year 8 pupils take Spanish as a second modern foreign language and in Year 9 all pupils follow a very effective course

in careers education and guidance. Since the last inspection more time has been given to teaching religious education.

46. In music, design technology and in ICT, taught across subjects in Years 7 to 9, the statutory curriculum is not in place. This results in a lack of breadth in pupils' learning opportunities. Inadequate lesson time for music in Year 9 does not enable full coverage of the National Curriculum programmes of study, planning does not follow the National Curriculum 2000 and ICT is not used. Neither does art and design follow Curriculum 2000. Consequently, standards are below average in music and in art and design in Years 7 to 9. In design and technology the statutory curriculum is not in place because computer aided design and modelling is not taught. The breadth of the activities experienced by pupils in design and technology is narrow in that opportunities to work with food are limited to one module in Year 7 and there are no opportunities to work with textiles. ICT is taught as a discrete subject in Years 7 and 8 but in Year 9 it is taught across all subjects of the curriculum. The requirements are mapped out clearly but not all subjects fully comply, particularly design and technology and music. Drama is not taught, either as a separate subject or, significantly, within English. Though not a statutory requirement, this is unusual.
47. In Years 10 and 11, the number of pupils taking English literature in addition to English language has increased significantly since the last inspection. All pupils follow courses in careers education and guidance, religious education, personal and social education and physical education. Pupils may opt to take GCSE physical education in addition to their other examinations. The statutory curriculum is not in place for all pupils in religious education, a significant minority of pupils in design and technology and around one third of pupils who do not take GCSE ICT. There is not enough time allowed for religious education in Years 10 and 11 to enable the locally agreed syllabus to be covered adequately. The curriculum provided at present is not relevant to the interests and learning needs of all Year 10 and 11 pupils as there is currently no access to accredited vocational courses. The school is aware of this and has plans to address it in September 2001. Planned courses include a GNVQ part I in business studies, to incorporate the present horticultural course, and a GNVQ part I in ICT.
48. Learning opportunities for pupils with special educational needs are satisfactory when they are within normal lessons. When they are withdrawn into the special needs department their learning opportunities are very good. Most pupils with special educational needs have the same curriculum opportunities as all other pupils. A number of pupils are disapplied from modern languages. This occurs in Years 8,9,10 and 11 and involves 14 pupils. An additional English course is provided for these pupils and they are also given help in modular tests. In design and technology, a group of lower attaining pupils in Year 10 takes a course in food technology that has no accreditation and is not meeting the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum in design and technology. The course in horticulture, although very successful in many respects, does not lead to accreditation at present.
49. Provision for personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is good. The programme of study includes lessons on personal development and learning skills as well as very good units on sex education, the misuse of drugs, smoking and alcohol. PSHCE lessons provide good opportunities for pupils to develop their values, attitudes and the personal skills that help to prepare them for adult life. Time allocation is adequate to deliver the present programme, but insufficient for further proposed development of environmental education and citizenship.
50. The provision of careers education and guidance is outstanding. It is taught as a discrete lesson from Year 9 to Year 11. The programme is very well structured. It ensures that pupils are prepared well for their choices at age 14 and 16, for work

experience and for preparing their personal statements as part of the National Record of Achievement. A good feature of the programme is the opportunity every pupil has to discuss examination courses with older pupils, prior to making decisions at age 14 and at age 16. Pupils gain a good knowledge and understanding of many areas of the world of work. The programme incorporates a number of areas of citizenship, such as financial matters, in Year 11. The teacher works very closely with the local careers service providers, and every pupil receives a guidance interview in Year 11 in preparation for their decisions post-16. The school ensures that pupils are aware of the full range of opportunities available to them. Staff and students from the local colleges visit the school to discuss courses with the pupils. A full range of higher education prospectuses is made available. Pupils frequently use a well-organised and up-to-date careers library. Activities in the careers programme contribute to pupils' education in key skills (literacy, numeracy, ICT).

51. The school has initiated a programme of extra literacy lessons, in Year 7, in which study skills are the focus. The degree of literacy encouraged and promoted in the school has a very significant, beneficial impact on pupils' attainment and progress. A whole-school numeracy policy is being developed by the second in mathematics, in liaison with heads of other subjects and through response to her circulated questionnaire. Pupils' levels of numeracy do not prevent them working appropriately in any subject. There are plans to develop a numeracy hour for Year 7, and this, with further emphasis and practice throughout all years, should improve all pupils' capabilities in numeracy.
52. Extra-curricular provision is good. The provision for sport is excellent and levels of participation are high. Inter-form competitions give all pupils the chance to take part in competitive sport. The school is particularly successful in cricket (County players), basketball, table tennis, athletics and football. Access to computers out of lessons time is very good; many pupils make good use of them before and after school time and during lunchtimes. Musical activities include a choir, concert band, jazz group and "open-house" on one day per week, though only small numbers participate. Other activities include public speaking and debating, a robot club organised by design and technology staff, Duke of Edinburgh Award, outdoor activities, and chess. Visits abroad include a French trip to Paris and Disney World, an annual excursion to the Belgian World War 1 battlefields and skiing trips to Canada.
53. Beacon School status and the Excellence in Cities initiative, enable gifted and talented pupils to be challenged and encouraged to excel through a programme of master classes. These include classes in art, Chinese, creative writing, mathematics, percussion and physical education. Beacon School status has also provided funds to let the science department organise science workshops for both Year 7 and pupils from the feeder primary schools and links are now well established. The modern languages department has also established useful links with a neighbouring school designated a Language College. There is a very strong partnership with Edge Hill teacher training college and many students from there experience teaching in an all-boys' Beacon school. Overall, relationships with partner institutions are satisfactory. Relationships with the business and industrial community, other than through work experience for pupils, are under developed.

### **Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education**

54. Provision for the spiritual development is satisfactory. Each day begins with an act of collective worship in either assembly or in form period. Assemblies offer the opportunity for self-reflection and prayer. For example, in one very effective Year 10 assembly, boys were encouraged to consider their own unique special gifts whilst a

number of volunteers from the year gave an active demonstration of their musical, athletic or biking talents. Since the previous inspection the spiritual elements of the curriculum have been strengthened through the introduction of a weekly whole-school theme for morning registrations and assemblies. In religious education lessons, pupils develop an appreciation of religious beliefs and values. They learn about the meaning and significance of religious symbols. They have good opportunities to question, explore and reflect upon rules for living and how these rules impact on their own relationships with friends and family, for example on the nature of forgiveness. Whilst some other subjects make a planned contribution to spiritual development more could be done. Physical education makes a good contribution. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their own strengths and to value themselves as individuals and as performers. In ICT, pupils have opportunities to consider the impact of new technology on society and whether computers can ever replicate the human spirit. In history, pupils who study the history of the medieval church understand why religion was so important in medieval times. Their study of the Reformation gives opportunities to reflect on why religion has been and still is the source of so much conflict.

55. Provision for moral development is very good. Most pupils follow codes of conduct; staff members provide good and effective role models in an environment of trust, tolerance and good humour. Work undertaken by pupils leads to their developing a clear understanding of right and wrong, and putting that knowledge to practical use in the classroom and elsewhere. There is a positive culture of self-discipline and reliability which is evident in the generally good behaviour in lessons and other areas of the school, and which stands out in the good sporting attitudes seen in physical education. Achievements are encouraged and rewarded in all areas of the school. Pupils are encouraged to think of others in fund-raising enterprises, such as those fostered by the music department. Moral attitudes are explored in depth in history; topics such as slavery and prison reform provide many opportunities for such study. A major outcome of the good school ethos is the willingness of most boys to listen to and accept the views and opinions of others.
56. Provision for social development is good. Most subjects offer pupils opportunities such as debate, games and investigations to develop basic social skills through group activities. Mathematics is particularly good at using investigative work in this way. Pupils develop self-confidence and self-esteem and take responsibility in the prefects' role and for their own independent working in lessons. Extra-curricular activities, particularly in physical education, where the award of Sportsmark' has been retained, are good; they help to develop relationships. The school has a comprehensive action plan for social, moral and cultural development and £20,000 has been allocated to improving and maintaining extra-curricular activities, including the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. Pupils are made aware of important issues, both locally and further afield. In mathematics, the use of census data reveals social issues; in geography, involvement in the 'Futuretown' project widened pupils' horizons and made them aware of issues in their own locality. There are still some shortcomings in social provision. There is a shortage of social areas that is particularly felt by pupils in Years 10 and 11. This problem may well be improved by the planned provision for new, covered social areas. In Years 7, 8 and 9 there is some concern by school staff that dining arrangements are restrictive and hinder pupils' social development.
57. Provision for cultural development is satisfactory, but the quality of this area of the curriculum has not improved sufficiently since the last inspection. Across the school the opportunities for cultural and aesthetic development are not as extensive as is

often seen in many schools. Pupils widen their horizons and experience and celebrate their own culture, as well as exploring new ones, but the overall provision is patchy. In English there is a good choice of fiction and non-fiction books to help pupils develop knowledge and understanding, but there is no provision within the curriculum for drama. The current extra-curricular school production of 'Lord of the Flies' gives some pupils opportunities for involvement in drama. The National Curriculum 2000 is not taught in art and music; in both these subjects standards are not high enough in Years 7 to 9. Cultural visits to theatres, museums and galleries, although happening from time to time, are not as frequent as they are in many schools. Some subjects offer good opportunities to study world cultures. In history there is good coverage of Islamic culture, and in geography there are good opportunities to challenge racial and cultural stereotypes. In art and design there is effective use of a wide range of artistic tradition including studies of Chinese, African and Aboriginal work. In other subjects, although there are attempts to widen the multi-cultural understanding of pupils, they are often insubstantial. The school runs a comprehensive programme of foreign visits and trips, but in a school with few ethnic minority pupils there might be more opportunities, through local visits, to learn about the diversity and richness of cultures in Britain.



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

58. Since the last inspection, the school has continued to provide a happy and supportive environment where pupils can make good progress. The school's arrangements for child protection are satisfactory and follow locally agreed procedures. The child protection co-ordinator is very conscientious and tries to ensure that all pupils with problems receive an adequate level of support. The school makes a clear distinction between the pastoral system, that involves year heads and form tutors monitoring attendance and behaviour, and academic monitoring, which involves key stage co-ordinators.
59. Year heads and form tutors provide pupils with good personal support. The registration period is used very well by most form tutors and provides a very good start to the day. Form tutors almost always have very good or excellent relationships with their pupils and make a considerable effort to get to know them well. Monitoring of pupils' personal development is generally informal. This is generally satisfactory because form tutors often have long established relationships with their pupils and know them well.
60. There is a missed opportunity to exploit these high quality relationships by involving form tutors in monitoring and supporting pupils' academic progress. Much of the support for academic progress comes from subject teachers and is variable. For example, there is very good support for pupils in English and physical education, but support is far less well developed in science and music. There appears to be little checking on pupils' progress through examination of homework diaries. This is attempted in Year 7, but is not as evident in other year groups.
61. Arrangements for the assessment of pupil's work are generally satisfactory. They are very good in modern languages and good in English, mathematics, history and physical education. These departments usually identify National Curriculum levels and make their pupils aware of these levels. In science, assessment procedures are unsatisfactory. Assessment in music is unsatisfactory, as there is no formal assessment at the end of Key Stage 3. Assessment of pupils' work in ICT, when it takes place outside of ICT lessons, is not satisfactory. Not all departments use the assessment of pupils to guide what they teach or to raise the standards of pupils' attainment even further. For example, there are classes where teachers know they have pupils whose attainment is low, due to their special educational needs, but teaching methods are not altered to accommodate the needs of these pupils. Neither is the curriculum currently altered, in Years 10 and 11, to ensure these pupils have access to courses where they can be more successful.
62. On balance the monitoring of pupil's academic progress is satisfactory. Many teachers have put a considerable effort into the school's complex system of monitoring pupils' academic progress, but it sometimes causes departments unnecessary work. Year 7 pupils complete a commercially available test, which provides an indication of their ability to work appropriately and of their potential GCSE results. These grades remain as a comparator throughout their school life. However, there are plans to improve this situation by carrying out further testing in Years 8 and 9. Departments who are using National Curriculum levels have to convert these arbitrarily into a predicted GCSE grade. There are differences between how departments produce this grade; some only use the end of year exam, others take into account unit tests and classwork. Some, such as music grades, are based on a totally informal assessment and often appear to be unsubstantiated. These extremely variable grades are then used as a numerical base to monitor pupils' achievements.

Although pupils' end of Year 6 test results are recorded, and many subject areas are aware of National Curriculum subject levels, this information is not adequately used as a basis to track pupils' progress. The present system has been used for a number of years to identify those pupils who are thought to be underachieving in most subjects. These pupils then receive support, with varying degrees of success. Mentors may be used to support pupils in GCSE examination classes. Although this system produces some useful data it is not yet used to ensure that there is coherent assessment across all subjects.

63. The setting of academic targets, for pupils to realistically aspire to, is relatively weak. Many subject areas set informal targets but these are not always recorded. Subject teachers do not set targets for improvements in the annual reports; pupils set their own targets, but older pupils are aware that these targets are not well formulated and are not taken seriously. However, they do recognise the potential of target setting. Those pupils who are identified as underachieving are sometimes set targets, but these are often too broad or woolly to be much use in raising further their standards of attainment. For example, pupils are supposed to ask subject teachers for extra work or told to avoid being on report. Pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties have specific targets on their behavioural programmes and these are monitored by the heads of year.
64. Pupils with special educational needs are integrated well. Teachers have good information about specific disabilities. Progress made by pupils with special educational needs is monitored and recorded each year. However, monitoring is not tight enough to ensure that all pupils make consistently good progress. Statements of special educational needs are in place and are reviewed annually. The special educational need co-ordinator has good links with outside agencies. For example, there is support for some pupils from STEPS (Sefton Teaching and Educational Psychology Service).
65. Procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are very good. The school has recently introduced a first day response system when the majority of parents are contacted the first day their child is absent. Year heads and the education welfare officer, who pursue the more difficult cases, supplement this system. These recent improvements have worked very well and attendance rates have improved from good to very good.
66. Procedures to monitor and promote high standards of behaviour are very good. Pupils and staff value the recently introduced behaviour policy. There is now an emphasis on social inclusion and a drive to ensure that causes of unacceptable behaviour are identified and resolved. The staged response to behaviour management, and judicious use of the isolation room, help to ensure that the inappropriate behaviour of a very small number of pupils is not allowed to interrupt the education of the majority, who are hard working and well behaved.

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

67. Since the last inspection, the school has sustained its effective partnership with parents. Parents have positive views of the school which continues to be very well regarded in the local community. There is a very active Parents' Association that continues to raise substantial sums of money for the school.
68. Parents support their son's work at school and at home. Most parents attend parents' evenings. Parents try to ensure that their children complete their homework. A significant minority of parents are concerned that not enough homework is set. Homework is set regularly in English, mathematics and science, but less regularly in other subjects, though this is partly due to the two-week timetable. The school feels that pupils do not always record their homework properly; this suggests that the school might not adequately monitor homework diaries. Many parents are keen to support homework tasks and projects. For example, as part of a Year 7 geography project, many parents helped their sons to produce compass roses from a very wide variety of materials.
69. Parents receive a good range of information from the school. The school web site provides regular up-to-date information about the work of the school. The new headteacher has continued the routine of weekly letters. The prospectus contains most of the information required by law, but does not make it clear to parents that they can withdraw their sons from religious education or collective worship if they wish. Parents receive two written reports a year: a brief interim report and a second written report. There are annual parents' evenings for all year groups where parents have the opportunity to meet subject teachers. Parents find the school relatively easy to approach if problems arise.
70. A significant minority of parents expressed reservations about the quality of information that they receive about their children's progress. The inspection team found the quality of the written report to parents, relating to their son's academic work, to be unsatisfactory. The format of the report is very restrictive. There is virtually no information about what has been taught and very little room to report on the elements of each subject, for example, speaking and listening, reading and writing in English or skills and targets in modern languages. Attainment grades for pupils of all ages are based on prospective GCSE grades and are calculated in different ways by different departments. Grades do not always appear to match written comments. The quality of comment is extremely variable; they are detailed in physical education and poor in music. Written comments are sometimes very negative: it would be more helpful to express criticisms as targets for improvement.
71. The special educational needs co-ordinator has very good links and relationships with parents through telephone and written contact. Teachers are always available for discussion. Parents usually attend annual reviews of their son's needs. Parents' views are taken into account when special needs are identified and at other times through the year.

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

72. The new headteacher, appointed in January 2000 but in post at the school from September 2000, is a very good leader with some excellent qualities. The long lead in, between his appointment and taking over, enabled him to take part in planning and decision making for the school year 2000-2001. Partly of a consequence of this foresight by the previous headteacher and the governing body, he has accomplished a lot in the few months he has been in post. He also loves his work, spends many

hours doing it, and has much enthusiasm and energy and advanced ICT skills that enable him to be a very effective manager. Not uniquely, but unusually, he is also an excellent classroom teacher, so when he asks his staff, through performance management, to strive for excellence, he could, quite honestly, say that he does not ask of them what he cannot do himself.

73. The headteacher is helped and supported enormously by a very good deputy headteacher who has lengthy experience of the school and is responsible, amongst other duties, for the excellent support for new teachers and for teachers in training. This is a very important aspect of the school, given current difficulties in teacher recruitment nationally. The school certainly has the wherewithal to be a provider of initial teacher training, as well as maintaining its current position as a partner with an institute of higher education. The deputy headteacher has effectively analysed examination and test data, and overseen assessment, recording and reporting of pupils' achievements. However, the art and science of using assessment information to ensure individual pupils are doing their best has moved on, and is an area that requires further significant development in the school. The annual reports to parents, about their son's progress, are also currently unsatisfactory. The SMT is small for historical reasons and the responsibilities of headteachers and deputy headteachers have increased significantly in recent years. The school is also increasing in pupil numbers. Consequently, a new deputy headteacher is being appointed.
74. The headteacher has a very clear, multi-faceted, vision of the future for the school. He is moving rapidly forward on many fronts, including standards, curriculum, teaching, management, resources and accommodation. All of his ideas, proposals, plans and actions are underpinned by the school's motto, 'Only the best will do'. Two major tasks have been accomplished, the 'Whole School Behaviour Policy' and 'Performance Management'. Both were priorities due to national requirements for social inclusion of pupils and to meet the next stage of performance-related pay for teachers. Both are model policies. The first is helping to maintain very good standards of behaviour and allows the management of the few pupils, who do not always behave as they should, to be more effective. Performance management should lead to further improvement in the quality of teaching and the elimination of the small amount of unsatisfactory teaching, so leading to even higher academic standards. The monitoring of teaching in the recent past has been too informal and unsatisfactory. A third task, ongoing but having significant positive impact on the quality of learning, is improving pupil access to ICT. Some improvements were planned prior to the headteacher's appointment, but these have been exceeded. The number and quality of computers is now very good, though not yet sufficient to support all subject areas. In addition, the headteacher is playing a very significant role in the development of ICT in the school due to his own expertise and experience. A small but significant part of this is the increasing use of e-mail for communications within the school and between home and school. School developments in this area are at the cutting edge of using ICT effectively both to manage a school and to help pupils learn.
75. In addition to accomplishing all this the headteacher, in consultation with his governors, managers and teachers has drawn up an excellent strategic five-year plan with a one-year school improvement plan encompassed within it. This planning demonstrates a commitment to improve the school, very good involvement by governors and very good financial planning.
76. The management of subjects is mainly good, though there is a spread from excellent to unsatisfactory. The management of physical education is excellent; this has a huge positive impact on standards, the curriculum and pupil enjoyment. English and

modern languages both have very good management and GCSE standards in these subjects are very high. Mathematics, history, ICT and geography have good management. Science, design and technology, religious education and art and design are satisfactorily managed. Science needs to move forwards in the use of assessment to support pupils, to inform curriculum planning and to improve general monitoring of standards. In design and technology, assessment procedures need to improve in Key Stage 3 and the range of work, though meeting national requirements, is too narrow. The management of religious education is enthusiastic and committed to raising standards but is restricted in scope by insufficient time in Key Stage 4. There are many weaknesses in the management of art, including the assessment of pupils' work, but the strength is that these weaknesses have been recognised and are being tackled. The management of music is unsatisfactory due to inadequate curriculum planning and use of assessment amongst other things. The management of music is adversely affected by insufficient, poorly organised time in Year 9 and inadequate resources and accommodation.

77. The governors have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and want to move the school forwards. They were rigorous in their selection process for a new headteacher and far-seeing when it came to the appointment. They have many statutory duties and fulfil many – finance, special educational needs, staffing and discipline – very well indeed. They have ensured most of the school's targets have been met and have overseen improvements in attendance and behaviour. Statutory targets for pupils' attainment at GCSE have not been met, though this is due, substantially, to targets being higher than might be expected to be reached between one year and the next. However, the school curriculum is not as good as it might be: it falls short of meeting in full the statutory requirements. In particular, the aesthetic areas of the curriculum, art, music and drama, are weak. This was a key issue at the time of the last OFSTED report that has not been sufficiently addressed. Neither is there yet sufficient time to meet the needs of the agreed syllabus in religious education, or sufficient monitoring of all work in ICT in Key Stage 4. Consequently, the effectiveness of the governing body is good, rather than being substantially better.

## **Staffing**

78. Staffing is satisfactory overall. Most teachers are well qualified and experienced. The need for a second deputy headteacher has been recognised. There are some temporary teachers, but not in excessive numbers; vacant posts are being advertised. The use of teachers in a support role for pupils with special educational needs is inefficient and this has been recognised. More learning support assistants are due to be appointed. Administrative staff are excellent; they enable the school to run effectively on a day-to-day basis.

## **Accommodation**

79. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. Most of the problems are associated with the size of the rooms being too small to accommodate the large classes using them. The problem is most acute in art, design and technology, mathematics and religious education, but it also affects areas, such as science, to a lesser degree. The lack of space is constraining teaching styles and, where machinery or tools are being used, creates safety concerns. Music suffers from a lack of practice rooms and the need to transfer instruments when it is being taught in rooms distant from the music area. The school also has problems with windows that are very rotten or very rusty, roof leaks, and corroding reinforced concrete in the walls of science laboratories. The library is too small for the numbers of pupils in the school and there is no assembly hall. A medium-term objective in the school action plan is to provide one.
80. Accommodation is good for ICT and due to be improved further with the addition of a new computer room in September. Science laboratories need refurbishment and the detached B block room is making teaching of the practical side of the curriculum difficult. This problem should be overcome in September with the building of an additional science laboratory. There are extensive outdoor facilities for physical education that contribute to its high standards but, whilst there is a useful sports hall, its floor needs attention.

## **Resources**

81. Resources are generally satisfactory and adequate to deliver the National Curriculum and GCSE courses. They are very good in ICT and good in physical education, geography and modern languages. Elsewhere there are some inadequacies. Textbooks are in short supply in science, design and technology, history and in the library, particularly for English. Music has insufficient 'non-pitch' percussion instruments of good quality. In design technology there is a shortage of quality power tools and of provision for food technology. There are no computer aided design or manufacturing facilities. Science has insufficient modern data loggers and probes, but this is about to be remedied through an interesting link with local primary schools using Beacon status money.

## **Special Educational Needs**

82. The management of special educational needs is good. Link teachers for each department meet twice a term. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) provides them with clear information regarding different pupil disabilities. All teachers have some in-service training every year on how to plan for all pupils' needs, although more training is needed in this area. Pupils' progress is not always tightly monitored across the whole school or within departments, although some, including French and physical education, monitor well. Departments have their own systems for recording pupils' progress towards their short-term targets. The SENCO does not monitor this. The use of support teachers to support pupils in classrooms is inefficient; it could be done effectively by appointing more learning support assistants. Accommodation and resources in the special educational needs department are good. The department has eight computers, although one is quite old. The governor with responsibility for special educational needs is very aware and sensitive to potential areas for development.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

83. To raise the standards of pupils' work further and to improve the quality of their education, the headteacher, teachers and governors should:

- (1) Raise standards in music and art and design by the end of Year 9, and in religious education by the end of Year 9 and 11, by:
  - ensuring the curriculum followed by music and art and design meets all the requirements of National Curriculum 2000;
  - providing sufficient time for music in Year 9 and religious education in Years 10 and 11;
  - seeking to provide some form of accreditation for religious education by the end of Year 11;
  - improving the overall standard of teaching, in Key Stage 3, of music and art and design.(Paragraphs: 6,9,13,31,42,44,46,47,109,111,159,160,165,179,181,184).
- (2) Raise the achievement, by the end of Year 11, of around 10 per cent of middle attaining pupils in science by:
  - taking steps to ensure all teaching in Years 10 and 11 reflects the better practice seen in Key Stage 3;
  - using assessment of pupils' work and other data better;
  - reviewing lesson planning in the middle sets in particular.(Paragraphs: 5,8,30,103,107).
- (3) Improve the curricular provision for drama, design and technology and vocational education by:
  - providing more opportunities for drama in the Key Stage 3 curriculum;
  - considering a GCSE option in drama;
  - increasing the time allocated to food technology in Key Stage 3 and increasing the range of materials pupils use for projects in design and technology at Key Stage 4;
  - increasing the use of ICT in design and technology;
  - proceeding with plans for vocational options in Key Stage 4.(Paragraphs: 42,44,46,47,121,125,128,152).
- (4) Ensuring all pupils, by the end of Year 11, acquire at least the full range of knowledge, skills and understanding in ICT required by the National Curriculum by:
  - monitoring the ICT work of pupils who do not take a GCSE in ICT more closely, assessing their attainment and reporting it to parents;
  - ensuring all curriculum areas identify the use of ICT in their schemes of work and use it appropriately in lessons.(Paragraphs: 11,47,148,152,182).

In addition to the issues raised above, the headteacher, staff and governors should consider addressing the following points in the action plan.

- Improving the use of assessment data to help teachers raise the standards of pupils' work further. (Paragraphs: 60-63,107,110,116,163).
- Increasing the proportion of A\*-A grades at GCSE in mathematics. (Paragraphs: 8,94).
- Improving the quality of the annual reports to parents about their son's attainment and progress. (Paragraphs: 70,158).
- Improving the provision of in-class support for pupils with special educational needs by increasing the number of learning support assistants. (Paragraphs: 40,82).
- Improving accommodation. (Paragraphs: 79,91,117,129,166,178,185).
- Increasing resources. (Paragraphs: 81,117,144,166).



## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	165
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	30

### **Summary of teaching observed during the inspection**

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3	30	39	24	5	0	0

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

### **Information about the school's pupils**

#### **Pupils on the school's roll**

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	863	
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	97	

#### **Special educational needs**

	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	36	
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	128	

#### **English as an additional language**

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

#### **Pupil mobility in the last school year**

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	5
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	14

## **Attendance**

### **Authorised absence**

	%
School data	5.9
National comparative data	7.7

### **Unauthorised absence**

	%
School data	0.8
National comparative data	1.1

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

**Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3**

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Pupils	Girls	Total
	2000	171		171

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Pupils	134	146	137
	Girls	N/a	N/a	N/a
	Total	134	146	137
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	78(66)	85 (71)	80 (73)
	National	63(63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	35(24)	63 (49)	44 (41)
	National	28(28)	42(38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Pupils	120	139	132
	Girls	N/a	N/a	N/a
	Total	120	120	120
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	70(67)	81(76)	77(79)
	National	64(64)	66 (64)	62(60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	33(32)	60(42)	32(36)
	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	Pupils	Girls	Total
	2000	148	0	148

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	Pupils	83	132	135
	Girls	0	0	0
	Total	83	132	135
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	56 (51)	89(97)	91(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	39(39.2)
	National	38.4(38.0)

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

### **Ethnic background of pupils**

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	4
Indian	2
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	1
Chinese	4
White	851
Any other minority ethnic group	0

### **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	23	1
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)	49.35
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.44

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

#### **Education support staff: Y7– Y11**

Total number of education support staff	2
Total aggregate hours worked per week	25

### **Financial information**

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	1 923 631
Total expenditure	1 898 153
Expenditure per pupil	2 251
Balance brought forward from previous year	26 370

**Deployment of teachers: Y7  
Y11**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	71
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Balance carried forward to next year	51 848
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**Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	25.8
Key Stage 4	24.8

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	792
Number of questionnaires returned	303

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	30	59	10	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	40	55	4	1	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	29	59	7	0	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	25	56	15	3	1
The teaching is good.	41	54	3	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	36	49	13	1	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	53	38	7	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	71	28	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	34	51	11	1	3
The school is well led and managed.	37	54	2	1	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	42	53	3	0	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	44	47	5	1	3

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

**ENGLISH**

84. The attainment of pupils in English on entry to the school is close to the national average. Standardised tests show that most pupils' attainment in reading and writing is average at the start of Year 7. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is a little below average. There are very few pupils for whom English is an additional language. In English, pupils tend to do less well than in mathematics and science in end of Year 9 tests, but do much better than either at GCSE.
85. At the end of Year 9 tests in 2000, results were well above the national average for boys' schools and those of similar schools. Although results have fluctuated over the last four years, progress through Key Stage 3 is rapid, with pupils moving up often more than two National Curriculum levels in their first three years at the school. By the end of Year 9, pupils can speak with confidence and begin to acquire a sense of formal register, though this is the least well developed of their skills. Progress in this area was clearly to be seen in a Year 8 lesson, where pupils were discussing, in preparation for a piece of informative writing, the changes that would be needed to make the school a suitable place for disabled pupils. Pupils were eager to participate and offer their ideas; most strove to express themselves coherently and forcefully. Many pupils can convey ideas with relevance and illustration and argue convincingly. Many can also read fluently for enjoyment as well as for work. They read with an increasingly high degree of concentration and often with good expression. Pupils' written work is often of a good standard, showing the ability to write thoughtfully and an understanding of many genres. Presentation is generally neat. Pupils write lucidly about views expressed in the media and show understanding of and empathy with Shakespearean characters, as well as being able to form their own coherent judgements. Written work develops well, both in technique and in content. A lesson observed in Year 9, on a key scene in *Macbeth*, was a very good example of literature being combined with information retrieval and methods of writing up the results of their own critical research.
86. At Key Stage 4, the quality of pupils' work often improves rapidly again. Many pupils show particular commitment and are ready to work hard, with thought and care. Pupils of all levels of ability make good progress. GCSE results in English in 2000 were well above average in comparison with the national averages for boys' schools and similar schools. Nearly 74 per cent of pupils achieved grades A\*-C and 100 per cent reached grades A\*-G. Similar standards have been sustained over the last three years. In English literature in 2000, 85 per cent of those pupils entered attained A\*-C grades. English literature results have also been consistently high over the last three years. By the end of Key Stage 4, most pupils are developing a wider variety of register, learning to choose the mode of speech appropriate for the occasion. They can argue, debate and express clear opinions on literature and on written styles in media work. They read literature with understanding, as observed in a Year 11 lesson on two poems by Carol Ann Duffy, in which steady progress in both understanding and critical skills were evident. They use good comprehension skills and have the ability to see the subtext of what they read and to understand nuances such as in poems by Ted Hughes in the examination booklet being studied by Year 11 pupils. They write, for the most part, in a sustained and concentrated manner, often using initiative and good research skills.
87. Standards of attainment are good at both key stages. Some good examples of work, designed by teachers to challenge high attaining pupils, were seen in their



coursework, showing that they had been carefully guided to reach their full potential. In general, progress is good in Key Stage 3 and in Key Stage 4. Pupils with special educational needs, and those for whom English is an additional language, also make good progress because of the goodwill and effort of their teachers, many of whom take great trouble to ensure that their needs are met.

88. The attitudes of pupils at all levels are very good. They listen to their teachers and fellow pupils well and treat the opinions of others with thought and respect. Levels of concentration and perseverance are very good, as is many pupils' motivation to study on their own initiative. At Key Stage 4, there are many examples of pupils who give significant time and energy in order to produce good results and who take great pride in their work. Relationships with teachers are very good, with an ethos of mutual respect permeating most lessons. Tolerance is a strong feature of lessons; pupils are eager to listen to the ideas of teachers and others and to come to thoughtful conclusions. The courtesy and good humour of the pupils make them a pleasure to teach and to observe. Personal development, evident in pupils' enjoyment of the subject, and the way in which they develop good study habits are both good.
89. Teaching is good at both key stages, but not always consistently so. Over 55 per cent of lessons observed were very good and 11 per cent excellent; six per cent were good; 17 per cent satisfactory and 11 per cent unsatisfactory. This is a high proportion of very good and excellent teaching, but, especially in Key Stage 3, teaching sometimes offers less challenge to pupils, work is not matched well to the range of abilities in classes, and management is not always satisfactory. Overall, the quality of teaching is making a marked impact on pupils' progress, especially in Years 10 and 11. The department concentrates on teaching the skills of English through a variety of methods, but primarily through the opportunities for purposeful discussion, individual research and informed reading and writing, provided by the study of both factual texts and by good literature. This is significantly improving the development of reading skills, the acquisition of a sensitive response to novels, plays and poems and the understanding of the ways in which authors use language to create effects.
90. The best lessons are those where the teacher has an excellent knowledge of the subject, conveying interest and enthusiasm to the pupils, and where clear targets are set and reinforced by good classroom management. In these lessons, expectations are high, the pupils are constantly being challenged and all receive very good advice, support and attention, illustrated well in a Year 7 literacy lesson on travel brochures. Teachers generally have very good grasp of the subject. Schemes of work have been devised that help teachers to plan across parallel classes within a year, while keeping some autonomy over their methods and approaches. Lesson plans are usually well focused, with clear objectives. They contain opportunities for practice of all modes of language teaching, including oral work, and good attention is paid to literature. Teachers' expectations of pupils are realistic and high. Where challenging work is given in Years 10 and 11, it is eagerly accepted. Teaching methods are usually varied and appropriate. The standards of discipline and management are very good. Pupils are motivated and pleasant and classes are managed through friendly relations and respect, as the school expects. Time is generally used well; there is a good balance maintained between different activities, each of which is conducted at a brisk pace. Formal and informal assessments are made continuously. Homework is used to very good effect to consolidate work done in class. All these factors ensure that pupils make good progress in their knowledge, skills and understanding.
91. The very experienced head of department has skilfully nurtured a highly successful and committed nucleus of very good teachers. Under his very good management, teaching is regularly monitored and good classroom practice shared, though weaknesses remain in Key Stage 3. Professional development of teachers tries to

ensure that the present high level of subject expertise is maintained. The curriculum is well planned and appropriate, pupils' progress is rigorously monitored and the results used to set future targets. The head of department has very ably drawn together and trained many of his team of teachers in order to sustain attainment at its present high level. Resources in the department are good. There is a range of inviting fiction in the library and a reasonable supply of reference books; there is also a growing opportunity for pupils to use ICT as an integral part of the subject. Accommodation is adequate, though the size and nature of the rooms give teachers little opportunity to teach drama in order to stimulate oral skills.

92. The previous report commended the good progress and standards in both key stages, which have since risen even higher. Comment on the fact that English literature was only taught to selected pupils no longer has relevance, since, by 2001, all but a very few pupils will be entered for both subjects. Texts for Key Stage 3 work are now relevant and demanding. Teaching was all at least satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection. Although there is now some unsatisfactory teaching, the amount of very good and excellent teaching is outstanding. The use of ICT has improved. This is a department that is improving on already high standards. It is a very real strength in the school.

## **MATHEMATICS**

93. Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 in 2000 was well above the national average and very high compared to similar schools. At the end of Key Stage 4 the proportion of pupils gaining GCSE A\*-C grades in mathematics in 2000 was well above the national average, above similar schools and in line with expectations based on their prior attainment. However, the proportion of A\*-G grades was below the national average. End of Year 9 test results are on a par with those in science and above those in English. GCSE results are not so good as those in English but have a better spread than those in science. There are fewer very good grades; the proportion of A\* and A grades at GCSE is lower than might be expected, but middle attaining pupils do better. GCSE results in 2000 were significantly better than in 1999.
94. Standards of pupils' current work are higher than those normally seen at the same ages at all levels of pupils' prior attainment, with pupils in the higher sets producing some excellent work. Older pupils, particularly those of middle to low prior attainment, tend to lose motivation and interest in their work as they progress through Key Stage 4, and their standards deteriorate. Although numeracy levels are high overall, some deficiencies and misunderstandings were noticed where there was insufficient regular practice of mental and written calculations. The introduction of strategies from the National Numeracy framework, such as the three-part lesson, with mental mathematics 'starters' and games, benefits standards of numeracy in Key Stage 3; pupils enjoy these challenging activities.
95. Year 7 pupils are taught in mixed ability forms, which create difficulties for teachers to match work to the ability of each individual. Those struggling, due to low levels of prior attainment or with special educational needs, are withdrawn on a flexible basis into a small group. Here, they can achieve appropriately through individual attention from the specialist teacher. Regular assessment of each topic, with good record keeping, helps teachers identify those requiring more challenging work or those under-achieving. Although there is a process to identify gifted and talented pupils and special master classes arranged with the help of outside institutions, there is insufficient provision for these pupils within the normal classroom and daily routine. The setting arrangement of Years 9 to 11 pupils, across the whole year group, allows

better matching of content and method of learning to pupils' prior attainment and aptitude. The Year 9 bottom set, a small group of 14 pupils, nearly all on the special educational needs register, were observed making good progress with fractions, decimals and percentages, with a learning support assistant helping as well as the very good specialist mathematics special educational needs teacher.

96. Algebra work is of a high standard throughout the school and knowledge and understanding of number patterns is used to good effect, such as in the Year 9 top set defining formulae for the number of moves in a sorting counters investigation. The Year 11 coursework task of 'T' patterns on a number grid also shows the high standards achieved through the emphasis on algebra and development of investigation skills, an improvement since the last inspection. A good example of using computers was seen in a Year 10 middle set lesson, investigating the pattern in straight line graphs, developing a definition of 'm' and 'c' in the standard equation  $y = mx + c$ , although for some pupils progress was hindered by the lack of ICT or literacy skills. Teachers deliberately did not 'spoonfeed' the pupils, but guided them to make their own discoveries while using and applying mathematics, such as the Year 8 top set which used spreadsheets to find the maximum volume of an open box. This process is sometimes uncomfortable for pupils, but helps develop independent learning skills, as long as the teacher judges when to intervene and give guidance. Pace and productivity diminished when many pupils in the Year 10 top set found difficulties extending a 'painted cube' investigation into finding the formulae for a range of cuboids.
97. Discussion is used well by most teachers, planned as an integral part of the learning process in all topics, years and ability ranges, developing the pupils' verbal skills – an improvement since the last inspection. Key words are displayed in all classrooms; pupils know and use correct mathematical terms well, demonstrating knowledge and understanding. Those pupils lacking self-confidence seek assurance from teachers that they are tackling problems correctly. Ongoing assessment in lessons is good as teachers circulate and explain methods and concepts clearly. Pupils help each other well, they collaborate constructively in pairs or larger groups, and relationships are very good. Attitudes to mathematics are very good, pupils show interest and often enthusiasm, and behave very well in lessons. The relationships between teachers and most pupils are very good, showing evident mutual respect and value.
98. On balance, teaching is good. No unsatisfactory lessons were seen, and in nearly a third of lessons teaching was very good. All teachers of mathematics have very good knowledge and understanding of their subject, and good methods of teaching of basic skills. Planning of lessons is good on the whole, including homework as an integral part of the learning process. Resources such as textbooks and practical equipment are good, available and used well, including the computers in mathematics rooms. The Year 11 set 3, revising transformations using a video, was an example of a successful lesson.
99. The team of four full-time specialists is enriched by a variety of other teachers also teaching ICT and business studies, and with responsibilities elsewhere. The department is led and managed well by a very experienced head of department, who has developed a good, comprehensive set of policies. The schemes of work are under development by the new and very effective second in department, to reflect National Curriculum 2000, the National Numeracy framework, enhanced provision of ICT and a policy for developing numeracy across the curriculum. The cultural dimension of mathematics is given insufficient emphasis at present, as is consideration of the beauty and power of mathematics. Improvement since the last

inspection has been good on the whole, with increased use of discussion and investigations, ICT enhancement and improved classroom display.

## SCIENCE

100. Attainment by the end of Year 9 in 2000 was well above the national average in comparison with all schools and very high when compared to similar schools. Observation of lessons and examination of pupils' work show that this is still the case. Year 9 test results over recent years show no trend, up or down. Pupils' performance in science is similar to that seen in mathematics, but better than that found in English.
101. At GCSE, the proportion of pupils who attained an A\*-C grade in 2000 was above average when compared to all or similar schools. Inspection observations confirm that these standards have been maintained. There have been no trends in recent years. The schools' standards in science are lower than they are in English, but broadly similar to those in mathematics.
102. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good. Pupils enter the school with National Curriculum test scores that are above average, but with widely different topic coverage and depth from the range of primary feeder schools. By the end of Year 9 standards are above average. Progress is most rapid in experimental science, where pupils acquire many useful skills for carrying out experiments. This is instanced by Year 7 pupils who are able to carry out distillation successfully and safely; in another experiment, investigating factors affecting the dissolving of jelly, most show a good appreciation of the need for a fair test and to repeat experiments to gain an accurate result. As the course progresses greater volumes of written work are produced and topics are covered in more detail, resulting in increasing skill levels and a greater range of knowledge. This is exemplified by Year 9 pupils, some of whom, when considering mammalian features, exhibited a working knowledge of those seen in monotremes, marsupials and placental mammals.
103. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. However, whilst higher attaining pupils achieve well, achievement is unsatisfactory for some pupils in middle sets who lose the momentum gained by Year 9 and produce disappointing GCSE grades. During the two years, teaching and written work show a steady expansion of topic breadth. This strengthens pupils' scientific skill levels and promotes a fuller understanding of work, as demonstrated by Year 11 pupils reviewing their knowledge of genetics and reproduction. Here, they showed that they had acquired a good understanding of some complex issues concerning hormonal control and genes.
104. In all years, pupils with special educational needs are known well by their teachers. Teachers write individual education plans for them, which are specific to science; they grade their approach and sometimes produce work specially tailored to their needs. These pupils make satisfactory progress, which often becomes good when supported by another adult. Higher attaining pupils are presented with more demanding work due to the setting system, but they are not always stimulated within their sets to go further. Achievement in ICT is good for word processing, using the Internet and spreadsheets. This is emphasised by a Year 8 group who made good use of computers to write up their experiments on fuels, including the use of e-mail to communicate with the teacher. Data loggers and probes are used less extensively, a deficiency to be rectified in the near future.
105. Most pupils clearly enjoy and take a pride in their science, especially experiments. They generally behave very well and work hard, so long as there is plenty for them to do. They usually work well in groups with most members contributing to the common

aim. Apparatus is handled with respect and increasing precision. They are keen to answer questions, but pose few of their own.

106. The quality of teaching is good for Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory for Years 10 and 11. Most lessons are well planned with crisp objectives that are made plain to the pupils. Classes are managed well and good discipline is maintained. Most lessons start with a check on what was learned last time; many conclude with emphasising what has been learned. Much of the teaching provides good factual knowledge for pupils and questions them to see if they understand it. However, only in the best lessons are the pupils encouraged to produce and to develop ideas for themselves, with the teacher injecting just enough information to enable them to go further and then standing back to allow them to drive the lesson forwards towards its objectives. This kind of lesson is really productive for learning and interest. That this is the case was very obvious in a Year 8 lesson considering states of matter, the transitions between them and mixtures. Here pupils were skilfully prompted to produce and to develop ideas; consequently they became very interested and learned a great deal which they will remember. Where lessons are less successful they are more likely to test pupils' knowledge and to provide a recipe for practical work. Some of the objectives are in soft focus, a narrow range of teaching methods is used and the lesson is teacher dominated; pupils learn, but are not stimulated. Almost all work is marked and the occurrence of teacher comments designed to improve the work next time is frequent, but they could be more consistently distributed. Homework is usually set and it provides a useful extension to pupil learning.
107. The management of the department is satisfactory. The courses fulfil all the requirements of the National Curriculum and GCSE; they are taught within a setted system. Whilst the classroom curriculum is good it is not enhanced by a good programme of visits or by the use of field courses and fieldwork. Whilst there are satisfactory systems for assessment they are not well used to monitor and support individual pupils or for regular individual target setting and tracking. The use of assessment to inform curriculum planning is not well developed. Also under-developed are systems to monitor teaching, pupils' books and homework so that standards can be raised further. Two efficient technicians, who work very hard to maintain and to deploy the resources, support science. The resources are adequate, but there are some shortages of textbooks. The main library offers a good selection of biology books and an adequate collection of physics books, but it is very thin for chemistry. The laboratories are one too few in number, but this is due to be rectified with a new laboratory in September. The existing ones could do with some refurbishment.
108. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. GCSE standards have risen, but progress in Years 10 and 11 remains slow for some middle groups. Behaviour has improved and fewer pupils distract others. Most lessons are now well paced with clear objectives. Some shortages of equipment and textbooks remain.

## **ART AND DESIGN**

109. In 2000, pupils' overall standards of work at the end of Year 9, indicated by teacher assessments, were below those expected at this age. Almost 64 per cent of pupils achieved at least the national expectation and almost ten per cent exceeded it. Trends indicate that standards are improving; the results in 2000 were ten per cent better than in the previous year. In 2000, pupils' standards in GCSE art and design examination results were above those in 1999, and fractionally above the national average for the proportion of pupils attaining grades A\*-C. Almost 89 per cent of

pupils obtained a grade in the range A\*-G. This was lower than in 1999. Results in art were relatively low in comparison to results that they gained in their other subjects.

110. The art and design department does not have any assessment procedures in place to identify pupils' levels of skills when they enter Year 7. Teachers' assessments within Key Stage 3 are often unrealistically high. This gives pupils incorrect messages about the standards of their work and of their teachers' expectations. Overall, pupils' achievement is unsatisfactory in Key Stage 3. It is at least satisfactory in Key Stage 4. Overall, the progress pupils make from Year 7 to Year 11 is satisfactory because most improve their skills throughout Years 10 and 11. Pupils with special educational needs achieve similarly to other pupils in both key stages and occasionally well. This is because teachers are aware of their individual needs, give individual help and, when necessary, plan specific tasks. For example, in Year 10, pupils take great care with their exploratory studies; simplification of their drawings of trees and their abstract compositions are good. Talented pupils have opportunities to develop expertise through individual tuition and master classes taught by visiting artists.
111. The standard of pupils' current work is below average within Key Stage 3. The standard of work seen within Key Stage 4 is average. Younger pupils depict form and tonal values, using layers of a variety of different types and colours of paper. They use shells as their starting point. Some higher attaining pupils work in an intricate way with very small pieces of paper. Pupils of average or lower prior attainment work hard to achieve different tonal effects. Most pupils are using their observational skills well. Lower attaining pupils have some extra adult help with their designs but persevere to achieve a satisfactory result. Other Year 9 pupils draw portraits of each other, or discuss and sketch ideas for an advertisement using a famous painting, after learning about the commercial exploitation of images in advertising. Most do not understand the basic proportions of a face before they start their sketch, so they have some difficulty with this task and produce work below standards expected for pupils of this age. A significant number of pupils do not maintain their concentration or attention in these lessons and this has a negative effect on their achievement, learning and standards. They learn about Leonardo da Vinci and the painting of the Mona Lisa, and gain some understanding of the different values of beauty and paintings during the Renaissance period. Work seen during the inspection indicates that pupils do not have sufficient basic skills in observational drawing. Most observational drawing is completed in homework exercises, without the advantage of focused teaching. The work carried out by pupils in Year 8 as they learn to 'grid up' to make an enlargement is precise and makes a good link with mathematics. Pupils learn well in this exercise.
112. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are average. Pupils are preparing for their final, timed test in their GCSE examination. All are working on individual projects. Some research work appropriately uses ICT, including the Internet. Some pupils are using printing techniques for the backgrounds for their final piece. A number of pupils are working on the theme of 'erosion and corrosion'. They explore the diminishing effect of an eroding, walking figure. David Hockney's work has been studied; some pupils are inspired by his swimming pool paintings and use similar shapes effectively in their own work. Images of famous buildings are used as part of their compositions, including Liverpool Cathedral and the Empire State Building. Several pupils work on the theme of 'historical origins' and have chosen the Second World War using images of Hitler and the battlefields. Other pupils have worked on 'religious origins', using their personal experience and knowledge of Australia and Aboriginal art to inspire their own work. Higher attaining pupils are generally well prepared and have good exploratory studies, using a variety of media including pencil, paint, pastel and

crayon. Other, lower attaining, pupils have much less preparatory work and have not yet clarified their ideas, although they have already had four weeks preparation time. Many pupils discuss their ideas articulately. They listen to their teachers' advice, extending their skills, knowledge and achievement. Several pupils have used poetry effectively as their inspiration. Previous work shows some sensitive tonal work using pencil and good textile work. For example, pupils have made a Chinese type fabric wall hanging, which has a particular spiritual quality. They take all their examination work and their art folders home and they do not always remember to bring them back when needed. Overall, pupils' exploratory studies in their sketchbooks are not developed well.

113. Art and design makes a satisfactory contribution to pupils' literacy and numeracy, for example through the use of specific vocabulary, discussion of artists' work, and reading aloud to their peers. Year 8 make grids to enlarge their work. Year 7 pupils draw squares accurately in preparation for a painting exercise and Year 10 pupils plan designs within a circle.
114. On balance, the quality of teaching is satisfactory. There is a small percentage of unsatisfactory teaching in Key Stage 3 and some good teaching in both key stages. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, teachers talk for too long at the beginning of the lesson. Because of this, a significant number of pupils lose interest and concentration and are no longer engaged in the lesson. The teachers' management is inconsistent and there is a lack of awareness of the pupils' level of involvement. Inappropriate behaviour is not challenged. Pupils are not given appropriate advice on techniques before they start their exercise. This has a negative effect on their learning, behaviour and attitudes. Some pupils do not follow instructions and talk when the teacher is talking. Where teaching is good, lessons take place at a brisk pace and the work is challenging. Because of this, pupils are involved and enthusiastic about their tasks. They learn new skills, including layering techniques, and they learn well. Teachers discuss work with the pupils and have good knowledge of their subject.
115. By the end of Year 9 achievement is unsatisfactory, though pupils learn the knowledge and skills taught, satisfactorily. By the end of Year 11 achievement and learning are satisfactory. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4. These are directly related to the quality of teaching.
116. Leadership in the art department is satisfactory. There are a number of areas that need to be developed. The school has already recognised several of these areas, such as insufficient exploratory work and the need to develop assessment procedures further. Steps have been taken to improve pupils' standards and achievement and the examination board has been changed. During inspection week the head of department paid very close attention to discussions regarding the improvement of pupils' standards and has already started to take positive action to improve teaching and pupils' attainment. In addition, teachers' marking needs to be more realistic and give consistently high expectations of pupils' attainment. There needs to be greater focus on observational drawing. Monitoring of teaching and work needs to be more formal. Pupils' ongoing examination work needs to be kept safely at school and used to help pupils review the standard of their work so they can make better progress.
117. Accommodation is unsatisfactory; classrooms are very cramped when many classes are being taught. Old chairs disturb pupils' concentration when they scrape over floor tiles. There is no technical support and work preparing and clearing up is an inefficient use of teachers' time.

118. Improvements since the last inspection have been unsatisfactory because teaching and progress in art then were good and are now satisfactory. Pupils' attainment was well above the national average then and is now fractionally above the national average. However, there have been some improvements: these include an increase in three-dimensional craft based work; the development of opportunities for textile work; and, the improvement of the study of art history, other cultures and contextual studies. Assessment of pupils' work is being developed, display has improved, some additional storage space has been provided and the department has acquired more ICT hardware and software.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

119. Standards of work at the end of Year 9, indicated by teacher assessment in 2000, continue to be above average.
120. GCSE results in 2000 are well above the national average for the proportion of pupils achieving grades A\*-C and about average for the proportion achieving grades A\*-G. Comparatively, pupils perform marginally less well in design and technology than they do in their other subjects. The overall trend has been one of improvement for the percentage of pupils achieving grades A\*-C. Groups tend to be large in resistant materials and much smaller in electronic products, with graphic products having been introduced comparatively recently; therefore, comparisons between the material areas are meaningless.
121. Standards of work in Key Stage 3 are good. Pupils of all prior attainment make good progress and achieve well in the attainment target of designing and making. They acquire knowledge and understanding through working with a range of tools and resistant materials, but their experience in food technology is limited to one module of work in Year 7, and they do not work in textiles. Pupils can apply their knowledge to make high quality products, like the variety of small holders made in acrylic for desk-top or similar use. In this case, a property of the material, its ability to bend when heated, is taken into account when designing their product. The standard of workmanship is above average in all the material areas. Pupils pay careful attention to accuracy and achieving a good finish.
122. A good feature of work is discussion. This takes place to evaluate finished items. Pupils use technical vocabulary and make thoughtful contributions. These show insight into the necessary considerations that must be taken into account when designing and making a product for a particular purpose. They are less good at organising their design folders so that they show the sequential steps in generating and developing their design ideas. The standard of presentation is variable; some potentially good work suffers because it is unfinished or is stored carelessly. An exception to this was the work observed in graphics where pupils do maintain their work in such a way that it clearly shows the development of their design ideas. A significant number of pupils lack confidence in making judgements about their work, and frequently seek teacher reassurance.
123. Standards of work in Key Stage 4 are good. Teachers attribute the slightly poorer performance of pupils, in design and technology GCSE compared to other subjects, to the high percentage of marks awarded in the examination for coursework portfolios. Teachers perceive that pupils are better motivated to work on the practical rather than the written element.
124. Some above average examples of completed design ideas are seen in resistant materials. Year 10 pupils of varying ability have produced some ingenious wooden stools that fit together without the need for traditional joints. A set of pupils' portfolios



from graphic products, where pupils had completed a module on mobile phones, indicates they can use a wide range of research skills, including using the Internet.

125. Products are made which are founded on well-developed design ideas. There is, however, an over-emphasis on the use of wood as a resistant material. Few examples are seen of the use of other materials or of several combined materials. Most products appear founded in two distinctive design styles that embrace sweeping curves or sharp edges. Pupils' work is therefore similar in style though very well made. Coursework portfolios are variable in quality and reflect pupils' standard of work and their interest. Pupils in graphic products have produced some original ideas, which they have modelled to good effect. Examples include car body designs and shop frontages. Limited use is made of ICT in work, partly explained by limited resources. Pupils with computers at home use them to enhance the standard of their work. Pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, make good progress through the key stage and achieve appropriately.
126. Teaching is good. It was not possible, however, to observe all teachers owing to absence. Teachers have very good subject knowledge that they communicate effectively to pupils. Technology skills are taught well and expectations of pupils are high. Examples of a range of work are displayed throughout the department and used in lessons as a resource. These factors combine to enable the pupils to understand what constitutes good standards. Pupils are encouraged to talk about their own work and express opinions about the work of others. This encourages debate and pupils gain confidence in oral skills. Teachers manage pupils and activities well, so that no time is wasted and, where resources are shared, they are used efficiently and pupils do not have to wait around. An example of this was seen in the workshop when half the class worked on the machines whilst the rest were engaged with a written task. Good teacher-pupil relationships exist; these promote learning by creating a positive working atmosphere and lessons move at a brisk pace. Currently, there are insufficient resources to cater for the full range of attainment.
127. Pupils respond to what is offered with interest and enthusiasm. They work hard and make progress, taking particular pride in their practical work. They are willing to persevere when difficulties arise as in the case of Year 8 pupils making electronic badges. When the system was initially unsuccessful and did not light up, modifications and adjustments were made until the desired effect was achieved. Most of Year 11 pupils are willing to spend a great deal of their own time developing their design ideas, both in school and at home. A minority of Year 11 pupils jeopardise their examination grades by poor attendance; this affects overall standards. Teachers have attempted to minimise the effect of poor attendance by producing a revision package, which is proving successful.
128. Leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. The department runs well on a day-to-day basis. Teachers work well together as a team and are ably supported in their work by a competent technician. At Key Stage 3, pupils do not receive their full National Curriculum entitlement. Currently, gaps exist in computer-aided design, computer-aided manufacture, and elements of systems and control. Pupils receive insufficient experience of working with compliant materials (food and/or textiles). Assessment procedures within Years 7 to 9 do not make pupils sufficiently aware of their current level of achievement and what they need to do to improve. This is not the case in Years 10 and 11, where assessment procedures are linked to examination board criteria and pupils receive good feedback. There is a lack of progression in food technology work between Key Stage 3 and 4. The newly introduced provision of a non-accredited food group is unsatisfactory. The use of ICT in all years is unsatisfactory.

129. Accommodation for teaching design and technology is unsatisfactory. This affects standards where large groups are taught in cramped conditions. In electronic products, there are insufficient wall sockets to cater for large groups in Year 8; teachers have to improvise. Large groups in resistant materials at Key Stage 4 result in pupils being offered a limited project option choice, in order to make classes manageable. The room in which graphics is taught is isolated from the rest of the department. Facilities for teaching food are inadequate. Some resources, like textbooks, need replacing. The quantity of modern power tools needs to be increased. A number of health and safety issues have been reported to the school.
130. Since the last inspection, satisfactory progress has been made. Results in GCSE examinations have improved. Graphic products has been introduced as an option at Key Stage 4 and ensures continuity from Key Stage 3. Assessment procedures have improved but there is scope to improve further at Key Stage 3.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

131. Standards of attainment in geography are high. In 2000, teacher assessment at the end of Year 9 indicated above average standards. The proportion of pupils attaining A\*-C grades at GCSE in 2000 was well above the national average. An upward trend in performance has been a little erratic, with 1999 grades below average and 1998 at above average. In 2000, not only were A\*-C grades above average, they were above average at each individual grade A\*, A, B and C compared with all and similar schools. All pupils have achieved an A\*-G grade for the last three years. This is better than the national picture. Pupils are doing better in geography than in all other subjects, except French and English.
132. Attainment in Key Stage 3 is average. Pupils' work in top sets is above average. Basic geographical skills are put in place early in Key Stage 3. Pupils can use co-ordinates, recognise symbols and measure lines and angles. They can also present data in various graphical forms. Written skills are well developed by the end of Year 9 by pupils at all levels of prior attainment. Note taking is good and there are many examples of extensive and imaginative writing. Use of number is generally good; the many skills of Key Stage 3 pupils are seen to good advantage in Year 7 enquiry work and Year 9 work on flooding. The former involves pupils in data gathering and the creation of guide books for Southport, many demonstrating the good use of ICT. In Year 9 a group of below average ability pupils was confidently calculating the discharge rates for a flooding river. Exercises, using the school environment, local geography and the world map, give pupils a spatial awareness and knowledge of places. The use of ICT is increasing in the department; it can be seen to good advantage in work with an innovative international football theme and in Year 9 reports on Niagara Falls that include use of Internet information. Lower ability pupils in Year 8 use word-processing skills in work on pollution. All pupils are gaining a good understanding of geographical processes and patterns and more able pupils in particular produce very good integrated studies on physical geography themes.
133. At age 16 standards of pupils' work are above average. Enquiry skills learnt at Key Stage 3 are honed in Years 10 and 11 and result in well thought out investigations in which pupils hypothesise, gather data, analyse and reach conclusions. Topics are varied and include 'Changes in British Farming', 'The Morphology of British Seaside Resorts' and 'Glacial Erosion and Port Glacial Scenery'. Good writing is supported by pupils' use of number. This is seen in demographic transition models and in Year 11 use of ICT in coursework on Southport's central business district. Across both key stages, pupils give confident and accurate verbal responses and, in addition, they

read well, although the department might like to promote still further the use of a technical vocabulary.

134. Teaching is good, and sometimes very good, in all lessons. 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' very high expectations ensure that pupils at all levels of attainment work at a very good pace and cover a lot of ground. Good, probing questions and innovative ideas keep levels of concentration high and pupils on task. They actively participate in lessons, as in a Year 8 role-playing exercise in which pupils were required to compose questions for interviews. Teachers augment their very good knowledge by selective use of audio-visual resources. Good questioning, and an insistence on complete answers, constantly reinforce pupils' understanding.
135. Day-to-day marking is generally good; at Key Stage 4, it is often very good, being regular, thorough and constructive. Homework is an integral part of lessons. It is set regularly, expectations of it are explained and, on return to pupils, it is reviewed well. Setting, the provision of suitable materials and much personal attention, help lower attaining pupils and those on the special educational needs register to make satisfactory progress. However, the department should ensure that opportunities to help gifted and talented pupils are noted in schemes of work. Progress in lessons is never less than satisfactory and very good in half of them.
136. Good teaching is complemented by very good behaviour by pupils. Attitudes to work are positive, as are the relationships between pupils and pupils and teachers. Co-operation and the valuing of others' contributions are high. Equally, high levels of understanding stem from the positive response to challenges, which entails pupils working independently and persevering with tasks. This was seen in a lesson in which a less able group worked on challenging racial stereotypes. The high level of grades at GCSE is testimony to the pace and effort put in to work by pupils, and the way in which all are included and encouraged within the department.
137. The management of the new head of department is good. He is strengthening the arrangements for monitoring teaching and learning and making appropriate changes to the curriculum. There is a united team in geography, working well at upholding high standards and working towards improving those areas that have already been identified for development.
138. Since the last inspection teaching has improved from 'generally good' to good and very good. Those areas that were commended have been maintained at a high level and two weaker areas of the department's work have been improved. Lessons now contain a great deal of variety and challenge and the use of ICT skills is being rapidly improved. In order to continue the improvement the department should concentrate on developing the use of National Curriculum levels at Key Stage 3, and using the information to improve teachers' knowledge of pupils' progress, target setting for pupils and adjusting the curriculum to better suit groups of pupils of different attainment.

## **HISTORY**

139. Attainment by the end of Year 9 in 2000, from teacher assessments, was average. At Key Stage 4, the number of pupils taking GCSE has been small for some time, but is beginning to increase. In 2000, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A\*-C was above the national average and the proportion gaining grades A\*-B was well above

average. With a small entry, results vary somewhat from year to year but they have been above average generally over the last three years.

140. The standard of pupils' work in Key Stage 3 is good. By the end of Year 9, pupils of all abilities have developed their historical knowledge, skills and understanding. Pupils demonstrate a good level of knowledge and a good grasp of historical terminology. Pupils can make use of historical sources to select and record information and to draw conclusions from them. They can evaluate sources at a level appropriate to their ability and they demonstrate an understanding of historical bias. Pupils produce a good standard of written work. Most pupils can organize and deploy information to produce good pieces of lengthy writing.
141. At Key Stage 4, the standard of pupils' work is average. Pupils demonstrate an appropriate level of factual knowledge and they can analyse the reasons for, and the consequences of, particular historical events. They can interpret and evaluate historical sources. The standard of substantial writing is the strongest feature of pupils' attainment at this level. Amongst pupils of average ability, the standard is good; amongst those of higher ability it is very good. Higher-level thinking skills, particularly in source-work exercises, are less well developed.
142. The quality of learning at both key stages is good. Pupils of all abilities make good progress within Key Stage 3 and satisfactory progress within Key Stage 4. They show interest in their work; they are willing to learn and to make an effort. Behaviour in lessons is good. Relationships between pupils and their teachers are positive. The pupils work well together and show respect for the contributions of others. In Years 7 to 9, pupils are particularly enthusiastic in asking and answering questions. Pupils generally sustain concentration, but sometimes their interest and effort declines towards the end of lessons or in later sections of their written work.
143. The standard of teaching in history is good. Lessons seen were never less than satisfactory. Most were good and some very good. Consistently good features included the sound subject knowledge of teachers, effective planning, clear objectives and high expectations, all of which promote effective learning. Teachers manage pupils well, ensuring an orderly atmosphere in which learning can take place. Teaching methods allow pupils of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, to make progress. In the best lessons, learning objectives are made clear to pupils at the start of the lesson, time deadlines are tight and there is a clear summary of what has been learned at the end. In most lessons, however, teachers could make greater use of visual aids to help focus the attention of pupils and occasionally teacher presentations need more life. History teachers make very effective use of group work, as in two Year 8 lessons on King John and a Year 9 introduction to Global Conflict. The department is particularly strong in teaching the literacy skills needed to support the subject. Extended writing skills are taught systematically; particular attention is paid to historical vocabulary and to spelling. As a result, pupils of all abilities make progress in their written work and their oral skills. Work is marked regularly according to departmental policy and effective feedback given to pupils to help them improve. Pupils understand how well they are performing, although they are not so clear about their individual targets and their potential. Teachers make good use of data on pupils with special educational needs to set them subject specific targets. Where pupils with statements of special educational needs have in-class support, they make good progress, but some do not receive this individual help that they need. Homework is used effectively to consolidate learning.

144. Leadership and management of the department are good. The recently revised scheme of work is excellent. It is detailed and comprehensive and incorporates the department's contributions to whole-school learning. The scheme of work ensures consistency across the department and gives effective support to both non-specialist and less experienced teachers. The history curriculum provides a good range of opportunities for the use of ICT, although consistent delivery of these is constrained by difficulties of access to central resources. The scheme of work gives due attention to non-European cultures and to the role of women in history. History makes a very important contribution to the social, moral and cultural development of pupils in the school. Departmental planning is effective and priorities are appropriate. The department's finances and resources are managed well. Formal and consistent monitoring of the quality of teaching and learning is currently inadequate. The department makes good use of its limited resources and teachers produce effective classroom materials. Textbook provision is satisfactory at Key Stage 4 but barely satisfactory at Key Stage 3.
145. Since the last inspection there has been an improvement in standards at Key Stage 3 and those at Key Stage 4 have been maintained.

### **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)**

146. Inspection evidence confirms teachers' own assessments at the end of Year 9 that standards are above average. This represents good achievement for pupils, as they enter the school with mixed experiences of ICT and with average standards. Pupils' standards of work and achievement have both improved since the previous inspection. GCSE results for summer 2000 were well above the national average and have improved since the previous inspection. For the last three years all pupils taking the examination achieved at least a G grade. The number of pupils achieving the highest A\* grade is increasing year on year, rising from none in 1998 to four in 2000. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher A\*-A grades is also increasing; in 2000 15 per cent of pupils achieved within this band, which is above the national average.
147. Pupils have timetabled lessons in ICT up to the end of Year 8. It is in these first two years that most pupils, including pupils with special educational needs, develop a good base of essential knowledge and skills. They can use a range of software for word processing, desktop publishing and for using databases and spreadsheets to make polished presentations of text and numerical data. They are skilful users of the Internet in lessons and, more particularly, when using the school's computer facilities in their own time. They have their own e-mail address and are confident in receiving and sending e-mails, including e-mailing the head teacher with suggestions for school improvement! Already, at this early stage of learning, pupils are encouraged to become active, independent learners. As early as Year 7, they are able to evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of an electronic database such as Pinpoint, over a paper-based database, and are capable of producing their own web page. In Year 9, a number of subjects make a significant contribution to reinforcing and developing pupils' skills so that by the end of Year 9 the vast majority of pupils are confident and experienced users of ICT. Pupils following the GCSE course are able to apply their skills in a number of different situations and can apply real-world applications of ICT to solve problems. They can analyse the paper-based procedures of local businesses, for example a local nursery, drawing up detailed plans for improving the running and efficiency of the enterprise.
148. Pupils in Years 10 and 11, who do not take a GCSE course, do not have any discrete lessons in ICT and their experience of ICT through other subjects is limited. These pupils, about a third in Years 10 and 11, are not following the National Curriculum in

sufficient breadth or depth and their standards, whilst good in some areas such as word processing, are satisfactory overall. From the above average standard they were at in Year 9, this represents unsatisfactory achievement.

149. The quality of teaching and learning is good throughout all years. This represents an improvement since the previous inspection. Very good subject knowledge is a common feature of the teaching and an important factor in motivating and encouraging pupils who enjoy their work and behave well. They are keen to continue their work outside of lessons. The computer rooms are open for supervised use before and after school and at lunchtimes, and are used very well by pupils from all years. During one session pupils were using the Internet for research, completing ICT tasks set in ICT lessons, developing their own web pages and using software for work in English, geography, religious education and history. Concepts are explained clearly. Teachers provide straightforward and effective demonstrations of applications, sometimes using the very good self-help folders developed by the subject co-ordinator or demonstrating on a large projector screen linked to a computer. Teachers expect pupils to work to high standards. They set challenging tasks and problems that draw upon pupils' knowledge and understanding of ICT so that pupils' skills and knowledge are significantly enhanced. Pupils would make even greater learning gains if they were allowed to work more in pairs, learning from each other, rather than working alone at the computer for half a lesson and from worksheets for the other half. Relationships with pupils are good; this gives pupils the confidence to ask questions and risk making mistakes.
150. High quality teaching, coupled with the very good knowledge teachers have of pupils' individual levels of attainment, ensures that pupils with special educational needs make as good progress as other pupils. Pupils taking the GCSE examination make very good progress and achieve very well considering their level of attainment in Year 7.
151. The management and leadership of the subject are good. Non-specialist teachers have received appropriate training. Clear guidance is given to other subject departments on the expected use of ICT in their subjects, but there is no monitoring of whether pupils who do not follow the GCSE course in Years 10 and 11 actually receive their entitlement, an issue still remaining from the previous inspection. They are not rigorously assessed against National Curriculum criteria for ICT and parents do not receive an ICT report in Year 11. Since the previous inspection there has been a significant investment in new computers, partly due to the impact of the headteacher's enthusiastic and knowledgeable approach to the subject. The numbers of computers are still slightly below the national average but plans are in place to provide more. The co-ordinator, aided by excellent technical support, has overseen the successful transition from the old technology to the new suites of brand new or upgraded computers. A home-school agreement on pupils' use of the Internet has been drawn up and is working well. The department is forward looking and innovative. Each subject has developed its own web page, and new courses for Year 10 and 11 pupils, in addition to GCSE, are being planned.
152. Opportunities for pupils to use ICT in other subjects are good. In physical education, pupils use video cameras to analyse their performance, and pupils following the GCSE course use a variety of software packages in presenting their projects. Good use is made of desktop publishing in modern languages and English. Pupils use word-processing and graphics packages in their geography projects on Southport. They use databases in gathering and analysing information in their Year 9 football

projects. In science, pupils use spreadsheets and graphics packages. In business studies, pupils use spreadsheets to calculate profit and loss. In mathematics, pupils use spreadsheets, databases and graphics packages. Little use is made of ICT for control in design and technology. In art and design, the use of ICT is underdeveloped, mainly confined to research using the Internet and CD ROMs. Little use is made of ICT in music in Years 7-9.

## MODERN LANGUAGES

153. Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 in 2000, based on teacher assessment was above average. Over the last three years, the school's GCSE results in French and Spanish have been significantly above national averages. The proportion of pupils achieving A\*-C grades in French, has increased over the last three years and was very high in comparison with the national average for boys in 2000. Last year, there were also four times as many A\* grades as the national average and more than twice the number of A grades. In Spanish, all pupils gained A\*-C in 1999 and 2000, well above national figures.
154. The standard of pupils' work in Key Stage 3, in both French and Spanish, is above average. In Key Stage 4, attainment is mostly above average. Pupils' achievement in both key stages is good, with some very high achievement in Year 11 Spanish and Year 10 French. In the main, pupils have good listening and speaking skills and more able pupils also have good reading and writing skills. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory, whilst gifted pupils achieve highly. More resources are needed to raise pupils' attainment further in reading, but the school has this in hand. Attainment in writing, in Years 10 and 11, has been improved as the school now enters pupils for the written coursework option at GCSE. There is greater emphasis on substantial writing across both key stages, but this needs to be planned and implemented more consistently across the department.
155. Teaching is good at both key stages, with a higher proportion of better lessons at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3. Teachers have a wide knowledge of French and Spanish and the foreign language is used well in the classroom. Ideas are presented well and explanations are clear. Teachers' planning is a strength. Much challenging work was observed, particularly in a Year 11 reading activity in which the pupils had to match two halves of complex sentences. This tested their understanding and their knowledge of grammar. Teachers sequence activities well, but there should be more opportunities for open-ended activities. Management of pupils is good and often very good. Teachers use time well and maintain pressure on the pupils to work quickly. At times, in wide ability sets, the pace is too slow because the task is not well matched to all pupils' prior attainment. There is good use made of ICT. Homework is appropriate and a good extension to work in lessons.
156. Pupils' learning in both key stages is generally good. It ranges from satisfactory to very good in Key Stage 4. Pupils have good confidence in their speaking. High and low attaining pupils are able to speak at length on familiar topics such as self, family, school and free time, because they have a secure basic knowledge of the language. However, they need to use French and Spanish even more spontaneously for expressing their individual needs. There are a few lower attaining pupils in Year 11 whose knowledge is weak and whose progress is insufficient. Many pupils persevere well even when they find the learning difficult. They struggle to understand but always try to complete the activity. High and low attaining pupils learn at a fast pace when activities are well matched to their prior attainment. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Their work and the progress they make, in relation

to their individual education plans, are both monitored closely. Talented pupils receive help in French and Spanish speaking and make very good progress. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good. The behaviour of high attaining pupils in Year10 French and Year11 Spanish is excellent. Pupils are totally engrossed in their learning and focus continuously on their language activities.

157. Management and leadership of the department are very good. Teachers work very hard as a team.
158. The department's system of assessment is very good. The high quality of marking, target setting, standard assessment tasks, and 'benchmarked' work is very impressive. Written reports to parents, including written targets to help their sons improve, needs to be better. Since the last report, there have been good improvements in pupil motivation, and end of course attainment. Speaking skills have improved considerably and provision of textbooks is now adequate.

## **MUSIC**

159. Standards at the end of Year 9 are below average. Teacher assessments for summer 2000 show too few pupils working beyond expectations or achieving an exceptional standard. Standards at the end of Year 11 in music are above average when compared with other subjects. The number of pupils entered for the GCSE examination in summer 2000 was less than the number entered in previous years, but the number of pupils preparing for GCSE in the current Year 10 is higher. The small number of candidates entered for GCSE makes comparison with national figures invalid.
160. Standards of pupils' work in Years 7 to 9 are below average. They are below average in Year 7 due to the limited musical experiences received by many pupils at Key Stage 2, and to the content of the music curriculum in Year 7. Standards in Year 8 are average, but below average in Year 9 due to a shortage of lesson time which results in insufficient coverage of the curriculum. Pupils in Year 7 cover the basic rudiments of rhythm and notation and employ them in the first of a series of keyboard modules. A class project, combining pitched and non-pitched percussion, several weeks long, is followed by a second keyboard module. The work cards provided for the keyboard modules are worn and difficult to read, with the fingering indications too close to the notes to assist accurate reading of the notes themselves, and the pace of success is slow. Pupils are only required to complete two cards per half term, and many of the more able pupils are insufficiently challenged and hence make slower progress than they ought. Pupils in Year 8 explore the origins of reggae music and participate in composing activities based on reggae rhythms, compose music for a series of cartoons, and write their own words and appropriate accompaniment for a rap. The change of pace in lessons observed and the resulting improvement in achievement in comparison with that of the previous year was significant. Pupils in Year 9 receive only one lesson of music every two weeks with the result that the beginning of each lesson has to be devoted to a thorough revision of the previous lesson's work. This also has an adverse effect on recruitment for GCSE. Activities involving performing and composing, using a variety of time signatures and bass clef notation, are followed by a work sheet on the symphony orchestra. Pupils have recently studied the origins of the blues and are presently combining their ability to play a 12-bar blues pattern with improvisations based on the blues scale. As little improvisation has been covered in previous years using more familiar scales, some pupils found this activity difficult. Written work for this key stage is of varying quality



and musical value; no evidence was seen or heard of any composition work in any format.

161. Pupils with special educational needs are taught alongside their peers and their achievement is similar, as their music making is not affected by any particular special needs they might have. Provision for the more musically able pupils is provided in the form of instrumental lessons and extra-curricular activities, but more stimulating challenges are needed during lessons.
162. Standards of work in Years 10 to 11 are above average. Many pupils have instrumental skills and experiences that help them to relate to the requirements of the chosen GCSE examination course. Pupils in Year 10 explore the various techniques used by composers – repeating patterns, sustained bass notes, melodies repeated backwards – and compose short pieces that incorporate some of these techniques with some success. They also develop their aural skills in preparation for the GCSE listening test paper by working on basic intervals and listening to music from different periods. Pupils in Year 11 practise past papers in preparation for the approaching examination and complete their composition portfolios. A sample of compositions heard reveals the work of the previous year being confidently incorporated in new, original pieces.
163. On balance, teaching in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. The initial lessons observed in Year 7 were unsatisfactory due to content that did not engage the pupils in worthwhile musical activities for half of the time. Standards of teaching, however, improved during the inspection as the content of the lessons was adjusted, with consequential improvement in response from the pupils, both in achievement and attitude. Lessons in Years 8 and 9 are planned more effectively, with the use of short, interesting musical activities to be achieved within a given time. This keeps pupils focused, thus achieving satisfactory results. Teacher assessment during the lesson is encouraging, providing pupils with insight into means of taking their work forward. These lessons also contain opportunities for pupils to perform the results of their work to the remainder of the class. This aspect of the lesson is given appropriate consideration by the pupils, both during their own performances and whilst they are listening to others. Teacher evaluation at the end of each performance is constructive, but there is little opportunity for pupils to comment, thus increasing their oral skills and use of musical vocabulary. Practising in lessons is managed well, despite the limitations in accommodation, enabling pupils to concentrate on their own work despite the labours of others being evident.
164. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is good. The teacher has good subject knowledge and makes good use of questioning to enable pupils to learning well. Good relationships exist between the pupils and the pupils and the teacher. Lessons are effectively planned with interesting tasks and move with good pace. This motivates pupils into working well to produce good musical results. Much of the written classwork scrutinised would have been better suited to homework and would have provided invaluable research opportunities. Marking of books is spasmodic and does not contain constructive advice, and incomplete work is not followed up. No homework was set during the inspection.
165. Management of the department is unsatisfactory and requires attention. Many of the issues from the last inspection have not been thoroughly addressed; this is affecting the quality of pupils' education. The scheme of work is incomplete, is not based on Curriculum 2000, and does not mention the incorporation of computers or the use of keyboard facilities to record and edit compositions. The multicultural requirement of

the curriculum is limited to reggae and blues, thus restricting the pupils' experience and knowledge of music making in other cultures. Singing in lessons was observed, but only in Year 7, in which it was allocated the last five minutes or so. The number of instrumental lessons has increased, but response to the extra-curricular activities is small in number and the variety of activities is limited to those of western origin. Ongoing assessment takes place during lessons and at the end of modules, but the results are still not used to thoroughly monitor pupils' performance or influence curriculum planning. Monitoring of teaching is still in its infancy, with no regular, formal observation of teaching in place.

166. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. There are insufficient areas for group practicing and instrumental lessons are often disrupted by the need to change rooms. Lessons that take place in the dining room are often delayed by the need to prepare the room for lunch or the late finish of lunch. Some class lessons take place in non-specialist rooms that require resources to be brought in and taken away for each lesson. Resources are unsatisfactory. Despite financial support from the school, the department does not have sufficient non-pitched percussion instruments, multicultural instruments or computers to meet the requirements of Curriculum 2000. As a result, the musical education offered to pupils is being affected. The department does arrange for pupils to attend workshops in jazz and percussion, but there are no arrangements for pupils to pass their experiences on to others.
167. Concerts are given, both at school and externally, and these receive welcome support from the instrumental teaching staff from Sefton Music Support Services. Owing to clashes of teaching time it was not possible to observe any instrumental lessons, which are totally paid for by the school, but some of the results were manifest by the musical playing of pupils in the extra-curricular activities, and in assemblies.
168. To complete the issues addressed in the previous report, and meet the requirements of the pupils as outlined in Curriculum 2000, the department should: examine all lesson content to incorporate some of the changes already undertaken in Year 7 lessons; revise the Key Stage 3 curriculum to include a wider variety of activities in lessons and strategies for incorporating ICT; develop the use of assessment to include the monitoring of pupils' performance and to influence curriculum planning; make appropriate use of homework to develop writing and research skills; and improve resources to assist the requirements of Curriculum 2000.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

169. Standards at the end of Year 9 in 2000 were well above average based on teachers' assessments. GCSE examination results are consistently well above average. The examination is taken by around one-third of the pupils each year, which is a higher proportion than is found in most schools. In 2000, pupils did not attain as highly in physical education as they did in their other examination subjects: there were few A\* grades. This is explained by the nature of the syllabus followed that did not enable all the pupils to be examined in every practical activity in which they excel. In addition, pupils take the examination as a course extra to those normally offered by the school, and many will be taking ten GCSE subjects.
170. The standard of pupils' work is well above average. At the end of Year 9 pupils can plan and put into practice complex strategies in football. They collaborate well to analyse their play and work on improvements, taking account of each other's strengths and weaknesses. They support one another and improve individual skills effectively. Standards in gymnastics are high. Pupils plan and perform challenging

sequences, both on the floor and on apparatus. They have a secure knowledge of the criteria for good performance and they use this knowledge to improve their own work and to help others to improve. In some lessons, the more competent gymnasts are not always challenged to improve the difficulty of the actions that they include in their sequence work. In all lessons, pupils warm up independently of the teacher and reveal a secure knowledge and understanding of warm-up activity. Pupils are competent observers and analysts of performance and they use the language of the subject appropriately.

171. At the end of Year 11 pupils taking GCSE attain very high standards in their practical work. In a softball lessons they display consistent and effective skills and a good understanding of attack strategies. The standard of their analysis of performance is very high. Throughout their time in school pupils have been encouraged to analyse their performance; consequently they have grown in confidence in this aspect of their work. Some middle and higher attaining pupils make good use of the Internet to research games skills and they are able to use this information to add to their understanding. GCSE students write well-reasoned essays that set out the pros and cons of the use of drugs in sport.
172. Middle and lower attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11, following the National Curriculum course, take considerable responsibility for planning football practices and organising team tactics to best match the needs of their players. Their decisions reflect a good level of understanding. Throughout the school, teachers' careful planning and high expectations ensure that pupils are prepared in the broadest sense for the variety of roles that are open to them in the world of sport. They are not only competent performers but are also confident analysts, coaches and officials.
173. The quality of teaching and learning is very good in all years. In about three-quarters of lessons, teaching and learning are very good or better. There are examples of excellent teaching in Year 7 and Year 10. Teachers have very high expectations of the pupils, not only of their practical performance but also in their ability to take responsibility for analysing and planning improvements to their work. Pupils respond very well to these expectations and, from an early age, they learn to work independently and are highly motivated. In all lessons the relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent and are based on mutual respect. Teachers value every boy's contribution; consequently they behave well, have a positive attitude and want to do their best.
174. Teachers use a very good range of approaches that ensure plenty of variety and pace to pupils' learning. Consequently, pupils enjoy lessons and work hard. Teachers use demonstrations and questioning very effectively to develop the pupils' understanding of, for example, football strategies in a Year 10 lesson or the definition of skill in a GCSE lesson. In GCSE lessons, the teacher ensures that the links between practical work and the theory are demonstrated and discussed. Homework is used very effectively in Years 7 to 9 and in the GCSE course. For example, Year 8 pupils set out their understanding of balance and the criteria for good quality gymnastics work in one piece of homework. Pupils work on homework tasks conscientiously, and most make good use of ICT to present their work or to carry out further research.
175. Teachers mark GCSE theory work very carefully and give clear guidance to pupils on how to improve. In all lessons, teachers continually assess pupils' progress. They intervene and give useful guidance and support where appropriate. Teachers know the pupils with special educational needs well and plan activities that ensure that these pupils succeed and make very good progress.

176. Teaching overall is very effective. However, there are several areas that can be improved. Pupils who are not able to take a physically active part in lessons do not always learn as much as they could. They are not always included in class discussions or given observation tasks. Although teachers use a good range of technical language they do not often use display to consolidate pupils' knowledge and understanding of technical terms. Learning outcomes for the highest attaining pupils are not always identified in planning. As a result, more highly skilled pupils are not always challenged to improve the difficulty of their actions in gymnastics. In some lessons, teachers' questioning includes too narrow a range of pupils and, as a result, some pupils make little contribution.
177. The excellent leadership of the head of department has helped to maintain and raise standards further. He leads a team of staff all of whom are committed to high standards and improvement. A very well focused approach to the monitoring and support of teaching and learning has resulted in the sharing of good practice across the department. A reflection of the commitment of the department is the excellent range of extra-curricular activities they provide, with emphasis on both participation and excellence. During the week of the inspection they included an inter-form cricket competition in which every boy in Year 8 took part, master classes in table tennis and football. The basketball team was successful in reaching the finals of a national competition.
178. The accommodation in which the department achieves these high standards is not the best. The sports hall is drab and in need of a face-lift and decoration. The all-weather area is in poor condition and does not drain well. The netting and boarding surrounding the tennis courts are in a poor state of repair and are hazardous. Although there are clear health and safety guidelines in place, a formal risk assessment of activities and working areas has not been carried out.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

179. Standards of work towards the end of Year 9 are below average. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs, have some knowledge and understanding of the important features of the major world religions, but only at a very basic level. From their study of Christianity, and particularly St Mark's gospel, they know the main events in the life of Jesus. They are aware of the important role played by John the Baptist. They know about some of the miracles Jesus performed. From their study of Judaism they are aware of the importance of leaders such as Abraham and Moses. They understand how Jewish life revolves around Shabbat. From their project on the life of Anne Frank they get an understanding of the historical persecution of Jewish communities. They have some awareness of the beliefs and values of Islam and are aware that the Buddha's teachings about life became known as the Four Noble Truths. However, the vast majority of pupils in Year 9, who had one lesson of religious education per fortnight in Years 7 and 8, fail to understand what religions have in common and how and why they differ. Few can use the correct terminology to describe the key beliefs and teachings of the religions studied or to make connections between them. They are unable to make links between the values and commitments inherent in different religions and their own attitudes and behaviour. Standards of work in Year 7, where one lesson of religion is taught each week, are average.
180. By the end of Key Stage 4 standards overall are still below average, as they were at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils have a poor understanding and knowledge of the key features and beliefs of the major world religions, including Christianity.

However, they have an above average ability in researching and discussing contemporary moral issues. They are able to express and argue a position on moral issues such as abortion, racism and genetic engineering, recognising strengths and weaknesses in the argument and sometimes sharing an understanding of religious perspectives upon these issues. Pupils are not entered for external examinations in religious education.

181. In Years 7 to 9, achievement overall, in relation to attainment on entry, is unsatisfactory. Until September 2000, the time given to religious education, one lesson every two weeks, was insufficient to cover the main elements of the locally agreed syllabus. However, now that the time given to religious education has doubled, there is no reason why pupils should not achieve at the expected rate. Year 7 pupils have always had one lesson a week and their achievement is satisfactory. In Years 10 and 11 there is still insufficient time to cover the locally agreed syllabus and achievement remains unsatisfactory.
182. The teaching of religious education is satisfactory. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject that enables them to answer many queries about religion and help pupils gain a better understanding of religious practices and beliefs. Lessons are often supported by the use of visual aids and artefacts, to help bring the subject to life and make it more meaningful; for example, pupils often enjoy tasting some of the special foods that are eaten to celebrate religious feasts and festivals. Parents have been helpful, providing specialist clothing, Kosher food and a Jewish daily prayer book. Marking is encouraging and supportive. A weakness in teaching is the lack of opportunity for pupils to learn by doing. In some lessons teachers spend too much time talking at pupils and although learning does take place, it would be at a much faster rate if pupils were more involved in the learning process. Insufficient use is made of computers, including the use of CD-ROMs and the Internet. Pupils are not given textbooks to work with, but photocopied worksheets that are dull and uninspiring. There are few visits to local churches, mosques, temples etc. and local faith leaders rarely visit the school to talk to pupils. The religious education classroom is too small for large groups of Year 10 and 11 pupils and restricts the teaching styles and therefore standards of achievement. For example, it is virtually impossible to do group work.
183. Pupils generally enjoy their religious education lessons and respond willingly to the demands their teachers make of them. Behaviour is usually good. On special occasions Jewish pupils make use of the RE room for lunchtime prayers. A small group of Year 9 pupils are engaged in setting up an RE web page. There is good support from the Sefton Schools' Church Youth Worker who is available for pupils at weekly lunch hour meetings.
184. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. Since the previous inspection there has been an increase in the amount of teaching time for Years 7 to 9 but not for Years 10 and 11. The statutory requirement to teach the locally agreed syllabus to all pupils is not being met in Key Stage 4. It was not being met at the time of the previous inspection. Despite having insufficient time to cover the agreed syllabus in Years 10 and 11, and therefore the opportunity to teach pupils a certificated course such as GCSE, the subject co-ordinator remains enthusiastic and committed to raising standards.

## **BUSINESS EDUCATION**

185. In GCSE in 2000, standards were average compared to all schools and all pupils passed. The prior attainment of pupils who take this option is mixed; it varies from low to high and changes significantly each year. Pupils behave very well, show good attitudes to learning and listen carefully to presentations made by their peers as part of lessons. Three lessons were observed; one was satisfactory and two were very good. Two lessons were taught in a very small room; this contributed to one lesson not being better than satisfactory. It was not possible to carry out the role-play exercise as well as pupils were capable of. A larger room is being made available next year. The head of department exudes enthusiasm for his subject and manages pupils very well indeed.

## **MEDIA STUDIES**

186. A new scheme of work for media studies at GCSE level, as part of the option system, has been introduced this year. It is a skills based course focused on practical involvement by pupils. It covers 'media literacy' and deals with ways in which technology is used in such areas as television, magazine, newspaper, film and advertising.
187. Year 10 pupils have begun the course. It was possible to observe two lessons during the inspection, both of very high quality, taken by the sole member of staff currently teaching the subject. Pupils were engaged in a unit of coursework on images for a CD cover, which involved the use of photography, computer technology and the writing up of analyses of the finished work. All were deeply involved with the subject and worked with an assiduity and enthusiasm that is rare. They were inspired by the expertise of their teacher and very willing and eager to follow proffered advice.
188. The course is fulfilling a useful purpose in providing a more practically based subject for some pupils at GCSE level, as well as providing an outlet for very real interest and involvement.