

INSPECTION REPORT

NUNNERY WOOD HIGH SCHOOL

Worcester

LEA area: Worcestershire

Unique reference number: 116979

Headteacher: Mr A Brodrick

Reporting inspector: W S Walton
1210

Dates of inspection: 7 – 11 February 2000

Inspection number: 197120

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:	Mixed
School address:	Spetchley Road Worcester
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr T Parker
Date of previous inspection:	4 December 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
W S Walton	Registered inspector	Community Education	Standards
		Special Educational Needs (SEN)	Teaching and learning
M Hackney	Lay inspector		Pupils' welfare
			Partnership with parents
J N Hedge	Team inspector	English	
		Equal opportunities	
		English as additional language	
D Klemm	Team inspector	English	
J A Seed	Team inspector	Science	
P Bowyer	Team inspector	Mathematics	
P Sellwood	Team Inspector	Art	
		ICT	
D Harris	Team Inspector	Modern Foreign Languages	
H Turton	Team Inspector	History	Curriculum
			Management
J Webster	Team Inspector	Geography	
D Wigley	Team Inspector	Music	
P Wall	Team Inspector	Physical Education (PE)	
M Harding	Team Inspector	Religious Education (RE)	
J Hardy	Team Inspector	Design and Technology (DT)	

The inspection contractor was:

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The Registrar
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

With 1,300 students the school is much larger than most comprehensive schools. It has grown significantly since the last inspection and is in the fourth year of a five year growth period. Most of the students live in the catchment area around the school but about one third live outside the area. Students come from a wide range of backgrounds and rather more than 10% take free school meals, which is within the average range for the country. About 8% of students are of minority ethnic heritage. Most of these students and/or their parents are from Pakistan. A very small number are developing their use of English as a second language. At the last inspection there were no students with statements of special educational needs (SEN) and only 40 on the SEN register. The identification of these students has become more secure in recent years and, although the proportions are below national averages, there are 12 statemented students and 176 students on the SEN register. The school receives students across the full range of attainment although the proportion of students with the highest attainments is relatively low. Overall, in recent years, attainment on entry has been close to the national average for eleven year olds. Almost 70% of students stay in education Post 16 although the percentage has fallen a little in recent years as the number of job opportunities for 16 year olds has increased. The school aims to prepare students for life in the 21st century with the knowledge, skills and personal qualities to enable them to prosper in a rapidly changing, highly technological, multi-cultural society.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school which has made significant improvements since the last inspection. It has many strengths and few weaknesses. It benefits from strong teaching and support staff who are well led by the headteacher and the management team. Academic standards are improving and are better than national averages at the end of Key Stage 3 and in line with them at the end of Key Stage 4. The school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- Academic standards have improved over recent years in line with the national trend at Key Stage 3 and beyond it at Key Stage 4.
- The quality of teaching is good across subjects and at both key stages. A significant proportion of it is very good.
- Students have good attitudes towards work and behaviour and relationships in the school are very good.
- Strong, decisive leadership provides a clear sense of direction.
- Very good arrangements for departmental reviews serve to maintain and improve standards.
- Extra-curricular provision is very strong.
- Standards of pastoral and academic support and careers guidance are high.
- The extensive facilities for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) are very well used.

What could be improved

- The breadth and depth of provision for Religious Education (RE) at Key Stage 4.
- The organisation of the school day, in particular the effect of one hour lessons upon the learning of some students and the allocation of time to some subjects.
- Standards attained by able students in science in the GCSE examination.
- The accommodation for music and science.
- The promotion of reading across the curriculum and the use and facilities of the library.

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 December 1995. Standards of attainment have risen both in National Curriculum tests and in GCSE. The improvement has matched the national trend in Key Stage 3 tests and gone beyond it in GCSE results. Standards of teaching have improved markedly. Unsatisfactory teaching has been almost eliminated compared with 15% at the last inspection. More than three quarters of teaching is good or better compared with 50% last time. Students work harder and the quality of learning and standards of behaviour have improved. The governors have a better understanding of their role and are more effective in carrying it out. The senior and middle management teams are stronger and there is better delegation of responsibility. The support and quality of provision for students with SEN are much improved and arrangements for the most able are better and improving. The personal and social education (PSE) programme has greater breadth and relevance and is taught more effectively. The provision and use of ICT are much stronger. The interior of the school is more attractive with many bright displays of students and other work. There is more frequent reporting of the progress of students to parents and better use is made of assessment information.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14 and 16 year olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
End of Key Stage 3 tests	B	B	B	B
GCSE examinations	C	D	C	C

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

Overall standards in national tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of Key Stage 3 are better than national standards. Average scores and the percentage of students obtaining Level 6 in 1999 are better than national averages in English and mathematics and in line with them in science. There is little difference between the performances of boys and girls. Overall average scores in the tests are better than those of schools with a similar proportion of students known to be entitled to free school meals, however, free school meals take up is not a reliable indicator of the characteristics of the school. Worcestershire has not had a school meals service for many years. In some areas of the authority a free school meal is a sandwich meal delivered to the school. The value of the meal is less than in other areas. Consequently the take up of free meals is low and under-represents entitlement. A more valid comparison would be to compare the school with those in the next higher band of free meals entitlement. Over recent years standards in national curriculum tests have improved in line with the national trend.

Average points scores in the GCSE examinations and the proportion of students obtaining five or more passes at the higher grades A* - C were close to the national averages and those of similar schools, applying a valid free school meals test, last year. The proportion of students obtaining five or more passes at grades A* - G was below the national average but significantly better than in 1998. In 1999 GCSE results at grades A* - C were very good compared to national averages in music, drama, mathematics and sociology. They were below average in art. Standards observed in the inspection were good in many subjects including history and art at Key Stage 3 and very good in mathematics at Key Stage 4. They were only unsatisfactory in RE at Key Stage 4 where most students only have very limited exposure to the subject. Standards in English and science were satisfactory but insufficient demands are made on able students in science. Over the last six years standards in GCSE have improved at a faster rate than the national trend. Results of girls in the GCSE are better than those of boys but their respective average scores are close to national averages. The school has appropriate targets for GCSE attainment in 2000 and 2001. Projected targets are based on the attainment of students at the end of Key Stage 3. The targets anticipate that the percentage of students obtaining five or more passes at A* - C and A* - G will continue to improve.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	The great majority of students like the school. Students are responsible and have a good attitude towards work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Students are very lively but their behaviour in classrooms and around the school is very good. They show respect for property and equipment.
Personal development and relationships	Teachers provide very good role models for students. Relationships among students and with teachers are based on consideration and respect. There is little evidence of bullying.
Attendance	Standards of attendance and unauthorised absence are in line with national averages.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is a strength of the school and much stronger than at the last inspection. Only 2% of lessons are unsatisfactory compared with 15% last time. More than three quarters of teaching is at least good and more than one third at least very good. Teaching is equally strong at both key stages. More than 60% of teaching is at least good in all subject areas. Teaching is strong in English, mathematics and science, especially so in mathematics at Key Stage 4. There is much very good teaching of students with special educational needs. There are good and improving arrangements for the teaching of the most able. Teaching of literacy and numeracy is sound but the school would benefit from overall policies for teaching in these areas.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements except in respect of RE at Key Stage 4. The organisation of the school day with one hour lessons is not always conducive to good learning and time allocations for art and modern languages are low. There is a very strong extra-curricular programme. Strong links with the community and business enhance learning opportunities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good provision. Work is appropriate to the needs of students, especially in Key Stage 3. Some work should be more demanding in Key Stage 4.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Students with English as a second language are fully integrated in the school. They are found across all sets and all GCSE option blocks. They are socially and academically integrated and with very few exceptions require no additional special support. They confidently contribute to oral work in classrooms.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good provision for social, moral and cultural education and satisfactory arrangements for spiritual development. A much improved programme for PSE. Very good arrangements for careers guidance.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. Students feel secure, they receive strong academic and pastoral support. Assessment information is being increasingly used to inform progress.
Working in partnership with parents	A number of parents feel that the school should work more closely with them. The school seeks to involve parents in the induction programme and in decisions about choices at 14 and 16. The special educational needs co-ordinator works hard to establish a partnership with parents of students with SEN. Parents receive good information about the school. They are encouraged to support learning by monitoring homework, supporting students on reading programmes and supporting comments made in reports. There is no Parents Association. Overall arrangements are good.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Leadership provided by the headteacher and senior management is strong, decisive and consistently pursues improved standards and the interests of students. Their commitment is shared by an effective and enthusiastic team of middle managers who have promoted much innovative practice.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors have a good understanding of their role and responsibilities. They are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and are fully involved in policy development and educational and financial planning. They make an important contribution to the work with the community. They work harmoniously with the management.
The school's evaluation of its performance	There is an effective cycle of evaluation and review of the development plan. Evaluation of students' performance is ongoing. The use of assessment information to monitor progress and set targets is good and improving. There is a very good programme of departmental reviews.
The strategic use of resources	Staff are effectively deployed. Overall use of the accommodation and educational resources is good. Use of ICT resources is excellent. The library is under-used and accommodation for music is poorly sited. Very good co-operation with the Leisure Centre secures enhanced facilities for PE. Very good liaison with the community extends curriculum opportunities. The voluntary commitment of staff provides an excellent extra-curricular programme. The management and governors continually seek to improve cost effectiveness through purchasing agreements, co-operation with other users of the site and review of direct services.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The quality of teaching. • The expectation that students will work hard. • The extra-curricular programme. • The progress made by students. • The school is approachable. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaison between parents and the school. • Homework. • Information to parents about their children.

The great majority of parents have a good opinion of the work of the school – less than 10% of the responses in the 375 questionnaires returned by parents had reservations and only 2% had strong concerns. The evidence of the inspection confirms the views of parents. About 20% of parents responding to the questionnaire feel the school should work more closely with them. The school does work closely with parents to provide a smooth introduction of students to the school, it involves them in option decisions in Year 9, it invites them to support students on reading programmes and the homework timetable. It establishes close liaison with the parents of students with SEN. Parents may feel more closely involved if the Parents' Association was reconstituted. The school is improving the quality and frequency of information it provides on the progress of students as it refines the use of its assessment information. It is moving away from computerised reporting, has introduced interim reports in Year 10 and is introducing them in Year 8. Some parents feel that too much homework is given, others feel that it is too little or irregular. Students feel the amount overall is reasonable but teachers do not always stick to the timetable and demands at the weekend can be heavy. The evidence of the inspection is that the content of homework is worthwhile and that it is regularly

marked. During the inspection homework was set regularly during lessons.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1 Average scores in National Curriculum tests for 14 year olds in 1999 were in line with national averages and those of schools with a similar proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals in science and better than them in English. In mathematics standards were better than those found nationally and much better than those of similar schools. Overall the average scores of the school were higher than national averages and those of similar schools. The proportion of students reaching the expected national standard was in line with national averages in English and science and better than it in mathematics. The proportion reaching a higher standard was above the national average in English and mathematics and similar to it in science. Standards have improved over the last three years in line with national trends. Girls do better than boys in English and the position is reversed in mathematics and science. Overall there is little difference between them. Teacher assessments against national criteria at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 showed that students were doing better than national averages in history and DT but below them in geography and ICT. Geography results were worse than those of 1998 but ICT results were better.

2 Average points scores in the GCSE examinations last year and the proportion of students obtaining five or more passes at the higher grades A* - C were close to national averages and those of similar schools. The proportion of students gaining five passes at levels A* - G was below national average but much better than in 1998. The situation reflects the policy of the school to enter some students for Certificates of Achievement and the Youth Award rather than for GCSE courses. More students are being entered for GCSE now and the school expects that the proportion obtaining passes at GCSE will improve. The proportion of students obtaining A* - C grades was better than the national average in English Language, much better than it in English Literature and mathematics and below it in science. Results were much better than national averages in sociology, French, drama and music and well below them in art. Overall standards of attainment in GCSE have improved at a faster rate than the national trend. Girls obtain better results overall than boys and the difference between them is similar to that found nationally. Targets for GCSE for 2000 and 2001 are appropriate and based on projections of attainment from the end of Key Stage 3. They anticipate an improvement in the proportions of students obtaining five or more passes at both levels A* - C and A* - G in 2000 and a further improvement in five or more A* - G passes in 2001. Students with SEN achieve well. All students were successful in Certificate of Achievement courses last year in geography, history, German and French and almost all obtained distinctions and merits. Although there was a significant proportion of distinctions and merits in science and literacy only half the students were successful. Students on the SEN register obtained 55 pass grades from 64 entries in GCSE.

3 Students have good listening skills which they employ to good effect in music when looking for ideas to help their own compositions and in modern languages to improve their spoken French and German. In lessons conducted primarily in the target language able students speak with good accent and have a good understanding of spoken language. Listening skills, however, require further development among students in lower and middle sets in modern languages. The high quality of discussions and questioning observed in many lessons bears witness to the attention students give to each other as well as to teachers. In most areas of work oral skills are well developed. In a top set Year 11 English

lesson conducted by the students themselves there was a very high quality discussion on the merits of a poem by D H Lawrence. Students not only showed very good understanding of the influences on the poet but displayed a very strong, confident and sophisticated use of language. A boy whose second language is English gave a clear and compelling account of his life as a Muslim which completely held the attention of his peers in a Year 11 bottom set in English. Students with weaknesses in reading and spelling are identified on entry to the school and provided with additional support. A very successful paired reading scheme, using volunteer Year 10 students, enabled Year 7 students to average gains in reading ages of more than a year in the last academic year. This year the scheme is to be extended and the training programme for Year 10 students is nearing completion. As a consequence of early intervention, students are able to meet the reading requirements of the curriculum. Much attention is given to the quality of writing. Standards of handwriting and presentation are good. Students are able to take notes and use drafting to improve their work. Many students across the range of attainment can write at length with flair and imagination although the quality of spelling and the knowledge and use of grammatical construction is much more varied in quality. Standards of basic numeracy are good and students make good use of their skills in many areas of the curriculum. They measure accurately in DT, can work to scale and construct models in three dimensions. In science they process their experimental results and express them in graphical forms. The breadth and depth of ICT skills has improved considerably since the last inspection. Good use is made of ICT applications across the curriculum. Many students word-process their final work. Students use computers in control applications including computer-aided design. They can use software to plot graphs in mathematics, produce graphical work in art and compose in music. Computers and calculators are used effectively to develop investigative skills.

4 Standards of work observed during the inspection only fell below average national standards in RE in Key Stage 4. Students, other than those following the GCSE course, do not have sufficient exposure to the subject to achieve a satisfactory standard. Standards of work in art are better than suggested by recent GCSE results. Students are pressed for time to have a proper range and depth of experience but students make use of the facilities of the department in their own time to develop their work. The standard of three dimensional work in clay is good. History is another subject in which results at the higher grades fell below the national average last year. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are good and students make sound progress in Key Stage 4. Coursework indicates that students do not always provide sufficient justification of their views to obtain high marks. The present revision programme should improve the situation but more attention should be given to students working at the C/D borderline. Standards are above national averages at the end of both key stages in PE. Students do well in the gymnastics and games programme and senior students have a clear understanding of health related fitness. Music, drama and sociology continue to be areas of strength which benefit from strong leadership. Teachers of music and drama are very skilled in and enthusiastic about their subject areas. Students of music have good theoretical and practical skills. In music and drama students co-operate very well in groups and drama students show good imagination and improvisation skills. Standards in English and science are sound overall and there is some very good work produced by able students at the end of both key stages in English whereas the work provided for high attainers in science is not always sufficiently challenging which, in turn, affects standards. Standards in mathematics are very good. A very strong base of knowledge and good attitudes towards mathematics are established in Year 7 and students confidently tackle work which would be considered beyond their capacities in many schools. Able students and those with learning difficulties achieve well from high expectations and challenging tasks.

5 Students with SEN achieve very well. Small groups, well differentiated work and teachers who know them well enable them to develop confidence in a range of basic skills. Standards of oral work among SEN students are much higher than written work. Standards suffer from a lack of concentration and insufficient challenge towards the end of some of the one hour lessons. The great majority of students with minority ethnic backgrounds are fluent in their second language. They are integrated in their class groups and participate fully in class activities – some take a leading role in classroom discussions.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

6 Overall attitudes to school are good. The great majority of students like school and expect to work hard. A Year 11 student who didn't particularly like school recognised the need to work hard, supported the values of the school and fulfilled his prefectorial duties responsibly. In almost all lessons, in response to challenging teaching and teachers who treat students with respect, students are enthusiastic and readily engage in their work. These attitudes are very evident in English, mathematics, science, art, DT, drama, music and PE. It is rare for students not to be interested in their work although there is some apathy among students of RE in Key Stage 4 who see little point in their brief exposure to the subject which carries no accreditation. Low attaining students lose motivation in music lessons which expect too much of them. Some students, especially in lower sets, have difficulty maintaining interest towards the end of one hour lessons in English and modern languages. With the above exceptions students show good powers of concentration and work productively on their own and with others. Students can be trusted to work unsupervised in the music practice rooms, in their own time in the art department and with ICT equipment in the computer club. Students take a pride in their work and standards of presentation are good. Attendance and unauthorised absence are close to national averages. Students arrive punctually for school and lessons.

7 Standards of behaviour and the quality of relationships are very good. Students say that the incidence of bullying is low. They will report it if it does occur and are confident it will be dealt with effectively. They are confident that they will have a good response from teachers if they approach them on personal or academic matters. The school has very clear expectations of standards of behaviour and consideration for others. Although very few students are excluded permanently from school, temporary exclusions are used, often to provide a short, sharp shock, to emphasise the values expected by the school. Standards of behaviour are very good in classrooms, in the crowded circulation areas and around the school. As well as showing respect for each other students have regard for safe and hygienic practice in practical subjects such as DT and they take care of equipment. There is no evidence of graffiti and there is an on-going campaign to reduce levels of litter. Students from minority ethnic groups are fully integrated in the school community. They play a full part in school activities and there is no evidence of any racial discrimination or harassment. In a presentation to a Year 11 class students showed great respect for the beliefs of one of their peers with a minority ethnic background. There are very good productive relationships in teams and groups in PE, music and drama. Students readily accept responsibility. Student librarians work effectively and the last group of senior students who acted as mentors to Year 7 students who wished to improve their reading established very positive relationships with their tutees – about 60 students have volunteered for this work this year. Students undertake charity and community work and employers speak well of the way in which they conduct themselves on work placements. During the inspection a prefect intervened in a very sensible and effective way in a dispute between two younger students. Students develop personally as they progress through the

school. Many Year 11 students are personally and socially mature young people.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

8 Overall standards of teaching and learning are good and much better than at the last inspection. Unsatisfactory teaching, which was running at 15% last time has been almost eliminated. The proportion of good teaching has increased significantly from 50% to more than three quarters and more than a third of teaching is very good. Standards of teaching are equally good in both key stages. More than 60% of the teaching in every department including PSE, which was an area of weakness at the last inspection, is at least good. Standards of learning are closely aligned with those of teaching.

9 Teachers have a strong command of their subjects. In RE some of the teaching is carried out by non-specialists but teachers have a good knowledge of their work and standards are not affected. Teachers of modern languages have a good knowledge of their target languages. There is a good range of specialisms among teachers of DT and art. Teachers of music are accomplished musicians. Lessons are well planned and teachers know students well so that work is well focused, appropriate to the needs of students and well supported. It was only in music that some work made unrealistic demands on students and motivation and learning suffered. In most cases expectations are high but not unreasonably so. In mathematics low attainers respond well to a 'real life' project they are working on in association with National Westminster Bank and in art they are encouraged to carry on working in their own time to improve the standard of their work. Very high standards are expected of top sets in mathematics and students are encouraged to enter the national mathematics challenges. In English and sociology skilfully directed discussion challenges students to think more deeply about their work and enthuses them towards higher levels of knowledge and understanding. Rich, imaginative discussions and stimulating themes in art catch the imagination and creativity of students. Similarly enthusiastic teaching and imaginative themes appropriate to the skills of students enable them to develop confidence, derive enjoyment and make good progress in drama. Student motivation is enhanced by good choices of music for practical work but standards of learning in music are adversely affected by different approaches by the two teachers. The enjoyment and interest of students is lifted by the enthusiasm which teachers have for their subjects. Students benefit from the enthusiasm and energy of teaching in PE. Theoretical and practical work are well integrated so that students, particularly low attainers, are able to understand health related fitness. Although expectations and challenge are high in many areas there is some room for improvement. In some science lessons too much time is spent on repeating previous work and copying and not enough challenge is given to high attainers. Similarly in geography some of the work given to high attainers is insufficiently demanding and some inappropriate tasks are set in DT which do not challenge students. Students with SEN develop confidence and good learning skills through sensitive teaching which focuses on their individual needs. Although limited support is available in the school it is well used and together with the practice of teaching these students in small groups it is effective in helping them to stay on task and understand their work. It is only in some Key Stage 4 option subjects that there are some larger, mixed ability groups. Teachers have effectively dealt with this situation in art by arranging the class into smaller groups. The small size of bottom sets is helpful in the teaching of basic skills. These are well taught in English and mathematics and integrated into the teaching of history. Many subjects, art, science and DT, for example, lay emphasis on the development of technical language.

Almost all subjects provide many opportunities for questioning and discussion which develop confidence and speaking and listening skills. Key skills are emphasised in the course leading to the Youth Award. Teachers include a wide range of computer applications in their work across the curriculum and the confidence and skills of students have improved appreciably since the last inspection.

10 Classroom management is very strong. There is a clear expectation that students will come prepared to work, which is respected by the students. Lessons begin promptly and are usually introduced by a statement of lesson objectives. Therefore, students have a good understanding of what is required of them and quickly settle to their tasks. Some lessons begin with question and answer sessions to check on previous knowledge. These sessions are usually handled skilfully, drawing all students into active participation. Lessons are usually planned with good shape so that activities are well sequenced with an appropriate balance of time between them. Often students have to maintain a fast pace to meet the lesson objectives. Key Stage 4 students had to be extremely well organised, on task and efficient to prepare and cook a range of pasta dishes in a food technology lesson.

11 In addition to ICT good use is made of resources to facilitate learning. Mathematics has rejected a rigid text book approach and uses many home made resources. In many subjects work sheets are used to complement textbook work. There is good use of video and additionally foreign language teachers use overhead projectors and tape recorders. Artefacts are well used in RE. Teachers use a wide range of approaches to provide a good atmosphere for learning. The very good relationships between teachers and students allow humour to be used effectively and often it is fun to learn. A very successful Year 11 English lesson was conducted by the students themselves. The leading student was extremely demanding of the quality and quantity of output from his peers and the lesson was very enjoyable as well as an effective learning experience. An RE lesson quickly engaged the interest of students when on entering the classroom they were given 'rich man' 'poor man' meal tickets. The comparison of their respective entitlements added reality to the ensuing discussion on world hunger. Throughout the school emphasis is placed upon independent and group learning. Almost all lessons have sessions when students are required to work individually or with others. Students working in groups are able to delegate tasks and reach consensus. Key Stage 4 students have a good range of independent and investigative skills. Teachers often adopt a tutorial approach whereby they will support and encourage students but refuse to spoonfeed them. Learning is encouraged by positive feedback and encouragement in classes. Success and effort are celebrated. Marking is regular and much of it is very thorough. There are good systems of assessment which are well used so that students have a good understanding of how well they are doing. Challenging targets are set in art but in some subjects they are insufficiently specific. Homework is set and marked regularly. It is worthwhile and very often provides a natural extension to classroom work.

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

12 The school has constructive and well-planned developmental links with its immediate group of feeder primary schools, facilitating smooth transfer arrangements and good induction for new entrants at 11. Curriculum links are less well established although there is cycle of termly meetings, which over three years will cover the National Curriculum subjects. Arrangements for sharing assessment data and social information are good with all schools. The school offers a broad curriculum, organised to meet the needs of students across the present range of age and ability, providing effective continuity and progression.

The time spent in lessons now meets national guidelines. All National Curriculum subjects are present in the curriculum profile. For the most part, these are taught in such a way as to meet fully the syllabus requirements, supporting the achievement of school aims in the context of a secure, caring and hard working environment. The Key Stage 4 option system provides good opportunities for students to complement the core curriculum by emphasis on particular interests whilst maintaining a balance across curriculum areas. Good provision and support for SEN students, promotes good levels of learning across the curriculum. The equality of access and opportunity afforded by the combined use of Certificate of Achievement and GCSE programmes in Key Stage 4 is a strong feature which is not fully reflected in published comparisons with national examination statistics. Good initiatives targeting the development of literacy and numeracy were observed in a number of lessons across the curriculum but the lack of an overall strategy to co-ordinate these aspects is an organisational weakness. The cross-curricular organisation and teaching of information technology is a major strength. This has been refined and improved since the last inspection, with students benefiting from the broad range of application with good practice reported in English, mathematics, science, history, geography, art, and music. There are some interesting initiatives to extend the experience of gifted students with materials produced through the Worcester City Consortium and Management of Able Pupils scheme utilising links with the Law Society, Internet competitions and music challenges. Extremely able students are identified, monitored and encouraged to participate in extra curricular activities such as Japanese, the English Computer Club and Year 7 problem solving activities at a local outdoor centre.

13 There are, however, some unsatisfactory features. Although identified as a key issue in the last report, there is still not sufficient lesson time to meet the objectives of the locally agreed RE syllabus in Key Stage 4 and the school does not meet the statutory requirement for RE. The school recognises this and has plans to address the issue next school year. The use of 60 minute teaching periods has an impact upon the delivery of some subjects. In modern foreign languages, some of the lower attainers find it difficult to sustain concentration throughout the lesson. Longer and therefore fewer encounters with the foreign language impinges on continuity of learning. The overall allocation of time for each language is below the national average. Reduced time allocation also has an impact in art, which is compounded by the wide range of students' attainments.

14 All other statutory requirements are covered. The school has responded to targets set in the last report and revised the teaching and monitoring of the personal and social education course. This includes appropriate health and sex education, attention to drug misuse, development of personal and social awareness, citizenship, management of personal finance and a strong careers education and guidance programme with a well organised work experience component. The effectiveness of the careers programme has won the school the distinction of being the first to receive the Hereford and Worcester CEG partnership quality standard award. The programme is valued by students and their parents and receives strong practical support and praise from local education business partnerships, further education institutions, community organisations and local public and private sector commercial and business enterprises. Indeed this partnership with the community is a strength of the school and the extent of local involvement is impressive.

15 The spiritual dimension remains the weakest element in an otherwise a strong and positive approach to students' personal and cultural development. It is very apparent in RE lessons, is present in art and music, features in the attractive displays, and is implicit in many aspects of the curriculum. This incidence is however, not planned or mapped as part

of an overall policy. Weekly assemblies often carry a strong, moral message using a variety of themes. They contain entertaining, meaningful and sometimes humorous presentations where students make talented contributions, especially through music. These hold the attention and often stimulate personal reflection. On other days however, the morning registration session does not provide opportunity for spiritual reflection. Consequently, the school still does not meet the requirement for collective worship.

16 The school has a clear code of conduct with expectations reflecting principles that distinguish right from wrong. Staff lead by example with the result that honesty, fairness and respect for the truth are fostered in many aspects of the curriculum. This produces positive relationships exemplified by the successful working of the school's anti-bullying policy. There are well-developed strategies for promoting social development, self esteem and a sense of personal and social responsibility. Students work well in pairs or groups, in team situations in sport, music and other curricular activities. Responsibilities are given to and accepted by students. This finds expression in charitable work often linked to local causes, fieldwork excursions, the active Duke of Edinburgh's Award programme, concerts, and in less usual ways such as the 'Munch Club' and the 'Days Out' programme for Year 7.

17 The curriculum offers an active approach to teaching students about their own culture as well as helping them to recognise the diversity of cultural traditions in the locality. Members of the Muslim community play a part in the work and life of the school and increasingly their special needs are being addressed. There is an earnest attempt to foster an appreciation of the diversity and richness of other cultures not only through geography and RE, art, music, drama and food technology, but also by including Urdu, Spanish and Japanese in modern languages. Modules in PSE address multi-cultural matters, a biennial "Day of Culture" for Year 7 and the growing use of the Internet also contribute. Community placements give good opportunities for Key Stage 4 students to meet and work with people from different backgrounds. A weakness, which the school recognises, is the current eurocentric bias of library stock.

18 A significant strength of learning opportunities lies in the very wide range of extra curricular activities which extend personal interests and provide additional academic challenge. There is varied choice encompassing music, sport, clubs, academic extension and support, visits, foreign exchanges, community service and outdoor activities. Students participate in large numbers and by so doing endorse the value of these opportunities - a sentiment echoed by their parents.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

19 The high level of care provided for all students is a strength of the school. Good procedures are followed to monitor students' academic performance and personal and social development as they move up the school. Students are well known to staff, and form tutors and heads of year play a leading role responding well and providing very good support for their individual physical, emotional and intellectual needs. Very good careers support is provided for students in Key Stage 4 including good arrangements for work experience.

20 Procedures for child protection are very good. Students giving cause for concern are quickly identified and reported to designated staff. Issues are well documented and

recorded. The school has strong links with outside agencies from whom students receive good and helpful support. The health and safety policy is closely followed, and as well as constant monitoring by staff, a formal risk assessment of the site is completed annually. The school follows very good procedures for monitoring and improving attendance and punctuality in all year groups. Students are encouraged to attend school regularly and punctually, and are rewarded by attendance certificates. The names of those students achieving 100% attendance are displayed in the main entrance to the school. Procedures for monitoring and promoting behaviour are good and are consistently implemented. There are very good procedures to deal with any bullying or oppressive behaviour and students are confident that any incident will be well handled by the headteacher and staff. Students are rewarded positively for their achievements, for example by form marks, merits, service to school awards and citizenship awards.

21 Good arrangements are made for the induction of students when they join Year 7 from the primary schools. Students speak highly of the support they receive to help them to settle in quickly. Close links with the neighbouring Sixth Form College and Worcester College of Technology support students well when they move into Post 16 education.

22 Students with SEN receive very good support. There is good liaison with primary schools and special needs co-ordinators discuss and exchange information, continuity and progression to ensure smooth transition between schools. Good arrangements are made to assess students when they enter the school, for example in reading and spelling, but there is no follow up assessment of students with weakness in these areas. All students have individual education plans which are kept up-to-date by regular review. Statemented students are reviewed annually, but there is some inconsistency in the response to requests for information from staff to inform the reviews. There do not appear to be consistent arrangements for academic support for students who are absent for long periods through sickness.

23 Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are generally good. A new system provides valid predictions to assist in measuring progress against set targets year by year to GCSE. Although this information is available to all subject departments, some departments make better use of the data than others. For example, the art department assessment process is very thorough - marking is regular and includes supportive and informative comments. This is tied into a constructive, criteria-based assessment programme, and target setting is well matched to the strengths and weaknesses which the procedure identifies. In the modern foreign languages department assessment procedures are very strong. Target setting is much used especially in Year 10, and assessment practice identifies under-achievement quickly when measured against predicted performance. There is much regular and accurate assessment testing against all four attainment targets. In other subject areas assessment is not yet sufficiently well matched to the whole school framework.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

24 The school has good and effective links with parents. Most parents are happy with the information they receive from the school, the quality of education provided and the academic progress made by their sons and daughters. The majority of parents feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or problems. This involvement of parents has a positive effect on teaching and learning and the progress made by students. Whilst some parents do not feel the school works closely with them, the school makes

considerable effort to keep parents well informed and provide them with opportunities to speak with tutors and heads of year both formally and informally. Most parents assist the school by signing homework diaries and the majority have signed and returned the home/school agreement. Parents of students with special educational needs contribute well and assist the school with the annual reviews and support the paired reading scheme. A small group of parents make a strong contribution to the Music Association, and provide good support for the school's musical productions. The High School Association which was active at the time of the last inspection has now been disbanded.

25 The quality of information which the school provides for parents is good. The headteacher sends out informative and helpful newsletters to parents twice each term, and regular consultation evenings for parents are held in each year group including a meeting for Year 9 parents when Key Stage 4 courses and the option system are explained. In addition, parents are invited to attend form tutor/parent evenings in October. Good arrangements are made prior to admission for parents to meet Year 7 tutors and to receive helpful information about the school. An additional induction meeting is also held for parents of Asian heritage.

26 Reports to parents contain clear information about the progress made, the level of attainment and students' personal development. The interim reports sent to parents of Year 10 students in February are currently being trialled in Year 8 with a view to extending arrangement across the whole school so that parents have more regular updates on progress. This improvement to reporting should address the concerns of parents who do not feel well informed about their children's progress. In Years 7 and 8 reports continue to be computerised although at the time of the last inspection some parents were dissatisfied with them. Reports are hand-written in Years 9 to 11 and arrangements are in hand to extend this approach towards a more personalised progress report.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

27 The last report commended the management of the school but identified developmental aspects. Most have been tackled effectively with consequent beneficial effect on student achievement. The school aims to provide breadth, balance, relevance, coherence, differentiation and continuity of learning through its curriculum organisation and delivery. Teaching approaches are intended to foster independence of thought, self-discipline, enquiry, and perseverance and to transmit accepted social standards in the context of a secure and caring environment. There is plenty of evidence that the school is being successful in achieving these aims, providing a good educational experience for students. Since the overall budgetary resources are below national averages in terms of income per student, this is achieved efficiently and economically. Budgeting is very sound and financial management is very tight. The management and governors continuously seek best value through their purchasing policies, contract agreements and joint user arrangements. The PE programme is enhanced by access to the Leisure Centre facilities. The school controls its own cleaning programme and has negotiated a grounds maintenance contract with other users of the site. Careful financial planning through the period of growth has enabled the school to fulfil many of its educational targets. Good planning and judicious deployment of personnel to meet the demands of the changing curriculum, lie at the heart of this success.

28 The governors, headteacher and key staff have a clear view of how they wish the

school to develop. This is based upon strongly held educational principles, which underpin the declared aims of the school. These are translated into the practice and ethos of the institution. The aims are widely supported. Staff demonstrate this daily in their teaching and in the courteous and sensitive relationships that are immediately apparent to the visitor. Academic and social expectations are high but realistic. Staff are encouraged to be innovative and respond positively - as in much of the teaching of mathematics, the scheme to encourage very able students and the 'Day Out' programme to improve student motivation. Student needs are recognised and there is a determined effort to help all students feel included. This is reflected in improving achievement, with GCSE results showing a significant upward trend over the last five years. Students recognise this and are proud of their school. Most parents endorse this judgement.

29 Since the last inspection, the senior management structure has been revised and includes new personnel. Responsibilities for curriculum review and development, assessment, the care of students and their personal development are delegated to key members of staff. Delegation is linked to sound evaluation techniques used to monitor the impact of implementation of prioritised plans.

30 Leadership and management at subject level are good and sometimes very good. Subject leaders exercise delegated responsibility effectively within the context of a defined framework and accept the associated accountability. The academic and pastoral work of the school is supported by good monitoring of student learning that produces a range of data to aid evaluation of teaching and learning strategies for groups and individuals. Senior managers work closely with governors who are kept well informed. Governors have a good knowledge of the issues facing the school and their budgetary implications. They effectively carry out their responsibilities. They fulfil their statutory duties except in respect of the provision of RE at Key Stage 4 and the daily act of collective worship.

31 Well-qualified staff are effectively deployed to deliver the agreed curriculum. The skills of most support staff are used well. Overall, there is a good balance between established, experienced teachers and newer entrants to the profession. Staff who are new to the school feel that they have received good induction and support, as do trainee teachers. Some aspects could be improved. Current plans to appoint additional specialist teaching time for RE are important if the legal requirements of the locally agreed syllabus are to be met at Key Stage 4. This in turn will strengthen the spiritual dimension within the curriculum. The teaching of library reference and research skills is underdeveloped. The library and the available skills of the librarian are not yet integrated sufficiently into the teaching strategies of the school. Formal appraisal of teachers is in abeyance pending national developments but there is an excellent scheme for the review of departments involving members of the senior management team, heads of department and external specialists to evaluate the impact of teaching and operational procedures. Four departments have been reviewed recently. Identified areas for development have been given defined focus in the current annual school plan with associated in-service training. The thorough departmental reviews would helpfully be complemented by regular developmental observations within departments.

32 Most of the reservations expressed in the last report about the school site are now inapplicable. Displays are good both in classrooms and on corridors and there is a welcoming atmosphere in the reception areas. There are good communal areas and students take care of the environment. The buildings and grounds are generally well maintained and are kept relatively free of litter and graffiti. Teaching takes place largely in subject suites and most teachers have their own base. Teaching spaces are usually deployed to good effect although some mathematics and modern language teaching takes

place in non-specialist rooms, located at some distance from the main departmental suites. Some areas of weakness highlighted in the last report remain. Although most classrooms are appropriate, some are very small to accommodate large teaching groups of up to 33 students. This is the case in the history area. The PE changing facilities for students and staff are unsatisfactory. The siting of the music rooms above the main hall means that practical music sessions all but disappear during the summer term examination period, which is clearly a serious constraint affecting skill development. Despite some improvements, some science laboratories need refurbishment, two are too small and not all services are located in the central benches. The library is too small to deal adequately with the increased size of the school. The linked careers area is also too cramped and needs another space.

33 Spending on teaching resources and materials has risen in real terms since the last report. The school has also benefited from a number of grants and specific funds for information technology, which have been spent wisely. The bidding system for subject funding works well with heads of department encouraged to link bids to departmental developmental planning. This, allied to prudent management and prioritised allocation, has given an improved level of resources for many departments. In many subjects, teaching and learning resources are good. There are still shortcomings. In English the range and level of resources are very poor. There are deficiencies in science where there are not enough books for students to use them at home. Although the library is a lively and friendly area, there are too few up to date books to support the current curriculum and stock does not reflect the multi-cultural nature of the school community. The level of book loans is therefore quite low. Although teaching and access to information technology is a particular strength of the school, there are no computer facilities in the library for student research. The school continues to make good use of resources in the local community to support its learning programme. Visits, field work, work experience and initiatives such as 'Project 19' linked to occupational training in the technical college, all enhance provision for the students.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

34 The school should now raise standards further by:-

- (1) providing more time to allow the expectations of the agreed syllabus for RE to be met at Key Stage 4;
- (2) reviewing the organisation of the school day –
 - a) to provide more time for the teaching of art and modern languages, and
 - b) to improve the quality of learning and teaching for students in lower sets with short spans of attention by reducing the length of lessons.
- (3) having greater expectations and higher challenges for able students in science at Key Stage 4
- (4) improving the siting of accommodation for music and the standard of accommodation for science
- (5) providing a policy for the promotion of reading across the curriculum

associated with greater use of the library within the curriculum.

- (6) improving the library stock, in particular it should reflect the multi-ethnic nature of the school.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	200
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	45

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3	32	42	21	2	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1,301	-
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	135	-

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	12	-
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	176	-

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	74

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	30
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	34

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.4
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.0
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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	146	114	260

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	82	99	80
	Girls	91	80	61
	Total	173	179	141
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	67 (66)	69 (68)	54 (58)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	31 (25)	42 (42)	24 (26)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	69	92	84
	Girls	76	73	67
	Total	145	165	151
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	56 (52)	65 (71)	59 (62)
	National	64 (61)	64 (64)	60 (61)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	28 (17)	37 (37)	31 (27)
	National	31 (30)	37 (37)	28 (30)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	1999	126	110	236

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	53	106	119
	Girls	56	99	105
	Total	109	205	224
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	46.2 (45.3)	87 (74.7)	95 (88)
	National	46.3 (44.6)	90.7 (89.8)	95.7 (95.2)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	38 (34.1)
	National	37.8 (36.8)

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	4
Indian	6
Pakistani	39
Bangladeshi	10
Chinese	5
White	1198
Any other minority ethnic group	11

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani	3	
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	68	6
Other minority ethnic groups		

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)	69.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	10
Total aggregate hours worked per week	203

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.0
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.3
Key Stage 4	22.4

Financial information

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	2,390,320
Total expenditure	2,397,706
Expenditure per pupil	1,884
Balance brought forward from previous year	73,201
Balance carried forward to next year	65,815

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1,301
Number of questionnaires returned	375

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	36	52	7	3	2
My child is making good progress in school.	45	49	5	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	31	56	6	3	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	26	56	14	3	1
The teaching is good.	38	54	4	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	31	49	15	3	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	51	39	5	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	54	42	3	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	24	51	15	4	6
The school is well led and managed.	39	49	4	2	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	38	51	6	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	52	40	3	1	3

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

ENGLISH

35 Average results in the English tests at Key Stage 3 over the years 1996 to 1999 have been close to the national average. In 1999 they were better than national averages and those in schools with students from a similar background. Girls achieved higher standards than boys but the difference was less than in many schools nationally. Standards have improved over the last three years.

36 By the end of Key Stage 3 high attaining students can read and understand increasingly complex texts such as 'Romeo and Juliet' although their reading out loud is less confident and assured. They write accurately and their essays are well structured. There is evidence of originality and development in written vocabulary. Middle attaining students can write sustained essays, listen attentively and understand more difficult texts. Low attaining students can express a point of view in class discussions and are beginning to write different types of essays.

37 At Key Stage 4 results in GCSE English were above the national average for A*- C grades in 1998 and 1999, with boys achieving better than they do nationally. Some low attaining students are entered for the Certificate of Achievement. In English literature standards at GCSE in 1998 and 1999 were well above the national average although numbers entered were low in comparison with other schools. The number of A*/ A grades was higher than the national average.

38 At the end of Key Stage 4 high attaining students can analyse and make perceptive comments about literary texts such as D.H. Lawrence's poetry. Their writing is well structured, mechanically accurate and often imaginative and creative. Middle attaining students read accurately and can write a wider range of essays. Low attaining students reach satisfactory standards in reading, write longer essays and develop a more extensive oral vocabulary.

39 Standards in literacy on entry to the school are below the national average. There are fewer very able students. Learning in lessons is good throughout the school. In Years 7 - 9 students make sound progress in improving their basic reading and writing skills. High attaining students work hard to develop an extensive written vocabulary and develop advanced reading skills. In oral work they gain confidence in discussing and evaluating the characters, plots and themes of novels. Middle attaining students improve their essays but need to extend their written vocabulary. Low attaining students improve their basic reading skills and the spelling and punctuation of their written work. At Key Stage 4 high attaining students make rapid progress and are prepared to work hard in drafting and redrafting their work. They are prepared to discuss new ideas and experiment with different types of writing. Middle attaining students gain confidence in writing reports, describing events and arguing a point of view. Low attaining students make good progress in improving the accuracy and content of their written work. SEN students make good progress throughout the school and improve their basic skills in reading and writing. Students with English as an additional language make steady progress and improve their communication skills but they would benefit from extra support to develop their reading and writing. There is no significant difference in the progress of boys and girls. When given the opportunity students benefit

from the use of ICT.

40 Students' attitudes to learning are good. Behaviour in lessons is very good and the majority of students are polite and cheerful. They respond well to lessons which have pace and challenge and are prepared to work hard at school and home although they need to be encouraged to read more widely. When given the opportunity they work well in groups and learn from each other. They improve their powers of concentration as they progress through school although a small number of low attaining students do not find it easy to work on their own when they do not have extra support.

41 Teaching is generally good throughout the school with many strengths and few weaknesses. The one unsatisfactory lesson observed was as a result of weak classroom management and a limited range of learning opportunities for students. Lessons are well planned and staff have a good knowledge of the subject and the students they teach. They work hard to produce quality learning resources and have high expectations for the students they teach. Discipline is good and teachers establish positive relationships with their classes. In the best lessons there is appropriate pace and challenge with teachers using a range of strategies which are linked clearly to specific learning objectives. Homework is set regularly and work is marked conscientiously and constructively and is attractively displayed in all classrooms. Written work could be improved if all students understood the assessment system and specific targets for improvement were set by staff. The department needs to encourage students to read more widely at home and to ensure that all staff start to use ICT in their lessons.

42 In English lessons the teaching of the basic skills of reading and writing is good and students are encouraged to develop their ideas in oral work. There is limited evidence of students being encouraged to read widely across the curriculum and students are not taught how to use the school library. In order to continue to improve standards the school needs to focus on developing language skills across the curriculum with a particular focus on reading.

43 Considerable progress has been made since the last inspection. Standards of attainment are above the national average throughout the school and teaching continues to improve with the pace of learning faster now with teachers having higher expectations for all students. Reading aloud is still a relative weakness and low attaining pupils would benefit from greater support at Key Stage 4. The new English accommodation provides a bright and attractive learning environment although the range and quality of books at Key Stage 3, in particular, is very poor. There are few texts in the department which reflect life in a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society. The school library is not as well used as it might be. The department is well managed by an experienced member of staff who has formulated clear policies and, with external support, is starting to review the work of the department. In lessons students are encouraged to discuss social issues such as homelessness and the morality of relationships in texts such as 'Romeo and Juliet'.

Drama

44 Standards of attainment in the GCSE examination are very good, with results consistently very much higher than the national average. In the classroom, standards are good across both key stages. Attitudes are good at Key Stage 3 and are very good at Key Stage 4, and this, together with very good teaching in both key stages, contributes to the good quality of students' learning. Teachers use very good specialist methodology and

have secure subject knowledge. They have high expectations of students, and deliver fast-moving, finely-focused lessons. They provide appropriate stimulus for students to develop and express their ideas imaginatively. As a result of this rigorous approach, students enjoy the subject at Key Stage 3, and take a very responsible attitude to the demands of the course at Key Stage 4. The teacher in charge of the subject has produced informative programmes of study for the English teachers who deliver drama and these are raising the focus of drama within the English department. The studio creates a pleasant working environment but could be enhanced with further specialist lighting. The common room floor would benefit from being covered with carpet for drama and movement.

MATHEMATICS

45 The standards in mathematics at Key Stage 3 are above average; the proportion of students achieving level 5 in 1999 was 69% against a national average of 62%. The proportion reaching level 6 or above was above average, at 42% against a national average of 38%.

46 At Key Stage 4 the GCSE results were well above the national average with 62.5% of students gaining grades A* to C (national average 45.6%). When these results are compared to schools with a similar proportion of students eligible for free school meals (and also when compared to schools with similar Key Stage 3 results) attainment at Key Stage 4 is still well above average. Although boys achieved, on average, better grades than girls the difference is not great enough to cause concern since this is not a case of under achievement. The proportion of students achieving the highest grades (A* and A) is broadly in line with expectations although the number of A* grades dipped slightly in 1999.

47 The mathematics department has shown some improvement since the last inspection in January 1996. At that time it was noted that about 10% of the Year 11 cohort were not entered for the GCSE examination. This situation has improved and continues to improve with increasing numbers of students achieving success at GCSE.

48 The standards of work produced by students are very good across the age range. There are some excellent examples of classwork and some good examples of coursework. Homework is regularly set, it is appropriate to the attainment of the students and the response is generally of a good standard. This applies to both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.

49 There is also provision of mathematics beyond the nationally set syllabuses. High attaining students are entered for the demanding UK Maths Challenge at Junior level (for Key Stage 3 students) and Intermediate level (for Key Stage 4 students). In 1999 about 45% of the Junior level entry achieved success at bronze level or higher and about 65% of the Intermediate level entry achieved success at bronze level or higher. Low attaining students in Year 10 are currently working on a project that involves working with an external agency, in this case the Nat West bank. This is giving valuable experience in "real life" mathematics and also helps develop ICT skills in the guise of spreadsheet work. Students in Year 8 have four lessons of mathematics a week (all other years have three lessons a week). This extra time is used to run the CAME project in which alternative methods of teaching and learning mathematics are explored. Although this is a very interesting experiment the project needs some refinement if it is to fulfil its undoubted potential.

50 The mathematics department has a policy to reject a rigid textbook approach and to encourage a diversity of teaching styles. This results in well focused lessons that generally challenge students though some of the home made resources need improvement. At both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 teachers' expectations are high. In Year 7 it is especially noticeable that higher attaining students are being stretched. The "theme" approach to the curriculum leads to thoughtful, well focused lessons and avoids the pitfall of re-doing work already covered in Key Stage 2.

51 Teaching is generally of a high standard. At both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 all teaching is satisfactory or better, most of it is good and some of it is very good, especially in Key Stage 4. Where lessons are tightly focused students respond well and learning is very good. Lessons generally start with a question-and-answer session where confident students are keen to demonstrate their knowledge; nonetheless the less assured students are usually skilfully drawn into discussion. The attitudes of most students towards the subject are very good and this constitutes a major strength within the department. Behaviour in class is generally very good, whether students are working by themselves, in groups or as a class. Students are generally well prepared for lessons. Very good classroom management and a good teacher-student rapport, evident in the vast majority of lessons, means that students respond positively to teacher instruction. The twin policies of integrating SEN students into normal lessons where they are supported by extra staff, together with small classes of low attaining students, is successful. Progress made by SEN students is good and the students themselves are made to feel comfortable in the classroom.

52 The monitoring of progress is carried out effectively by means of internal tests held twice a term and homeworks. The results of these tests, together with teacher recommendations and homework records, are used to determine effective setting arrangements and appropriate examination entries.

53 The mathematics department shows clear, calm and effective leadership. The handbook is clear and well written, the scheme of work is comprehensive and accessible and there is a well thought out development plan. It is clear that the mathematics department promotes high standards. The department, in conjunction with senior management, sets high but realistic targets. These targets at both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 are being met. The mathematics staff constitute a mixture of the young and the experienced and they work together well as a unit. Staff are allocated groups appropriate to the strengths of the individual teachers; nonetheless there is a good departmental policy to share out the high and low achieving sets amongst the staff so that all can experience teaching the full range of attainment.

54 The accommodation within the mathematics department (six specialist classrooms) is adequate for teaching Years 7 and 8. The mathematics rooms, in the main, are well maintained although in need of carpeting. There is a pleasing variety of students' work and other mathematical material displayed on most classroom walls. However, when whole year groups are taught there is an overspill into non-specialist classrooms which obviously lack helpful wall displays.

55 One mathematics classroom has been fitted with fifteen computers. This is adequate for the needs of the department which teaches LOGO and spreadsheet work to Years 7 and 8. The department also has a set of graphical calculators available. However, not all staff are confident in the use of such calculators and it would be advisable to provide INSET so that full and effective use could be made of the new technology. There is no direct strategy for teaching students how to make the most of their own calculators. With

different models having different logic systems it is important to teach pupils the most effective ways of using calculators.

56 Most of the classrooms have relatively new desks which are well looked after and classrooms are free of litter; more evidence of the positive and mature attitudes of students in the mathematics area and of their respect for property.

57 There has been an interesting experiment over the last two years with single sex groupings. There is insufficient evidence available at this stage to comment on its effectiveness but it is a bold experiment broadly in line with an imaginative approach to teaching shown by the mathematics department.

SCIENCE

58 Most students achieve standards that are in line with expectations at the end of each key stage. The results obtained in the 1999 National Curriculum tests for all 15 year olds were close to the national averages and broadly in line with those of schools having similar proportions of students eligible for free school meals. The average points scores over the last four years have been slightly above average and follow the national trend. Boys have performed slightly better than girls. The proportions gaining both A*- C and the highest grade A* in the 1999 GCSE examinations were below the national averages and significantly lower than in 1998 when they were both above. In both years boys performed similarly to the girls. Over the last three years both boys and girls have not performed as well as in their other subjects. The 1999 results were broadly in line with those of schools having similar proportions of students eligible for free school meals. The proportion gaining A*- C grades was well below those of schools with students who performed similarly two years previously. The average points score was in line with that predicted on the basis of performance in the National Curriculum tests in 1997.

59 Following the 1999 GCSE results and the relatively weaker performance of science compared to other subjects a full review took place last term. Arising from this, strategies for raising attainment have been identified and some have already been implemented. For example collation of assessment data and the use of information from it to set targets for individuals. A comprehensive revision programme with extra classes after school is also planned. Completely new schemes of work are to be introduced which are considered to be more appropriate for implementing the revised national curriculum.

60 By the end of each key stage students have a sound knowledge and a secure understanding of the subject matter across each of the attainment targets. Skills required in investigative work – planning, predicting, observing, measuring and recording in Key Stage 3 and interpreting and evaluating in Key Stage 4, all develop to the levels expected. Students have the numeracy skills required enabling them to process their experimental results and they present them in various graphical forms. Most Year 9 students know what forces do, can measure them and calculate simple pressures. Higher attainers accurately describe skeletal functions and soon learn about muscle action while lower ones know matter is made up of particles and with prompting can describe their behaviour in solids, liquids and gases. Year 11 students name and give structures of hydrocarbons and understand the cracking process. Higher attainers describe how glucose levels are controlled in the body. In one lesson a group of lower attainers competently planned and made sensible predictions in an experiment. They ensured it was a fair test and successfully completed it. The quality of learning of most students is usually at least good

and often very good for students with special educational needs. In a few lessons it is not as good as it should be for higher attainers. The quality of teaching and the positive attitudes of students promote good learning. Students quickly settle, are attentive and concentrate very well. They are interested, respond well and confidently put forward ideas. They are very well behaved and co-operate well with each other in groups working safely and productively without constant close supervision.

61 The quality of teaching has significantly improved since the last inspection. It is always at least satisfactory and good or better in over three quarters of lessons. Teachers know their subject well and make it comprehensible using contexts to which students readily relate. Some include relevant personal experiences which capture interest. They know students very well and skilfully question them to draw out information, make them think and apply and to check understanding. Occasionally questions are not sufficiently targeted to immediately focus individuals. Lessons are usually well planned with a good variety of appropriate activities which keep students motivated but sometimes higher attainers in Year 11 did not make satisfactory progress. In one lesson students spent too much time consolidating previous work and repeating skills already acquired, while another lacked challenge and many students spent almost half of the lesson copying from the text book. Teachers make the objectives of lessons clear and ensure students know what they have to do. Class management is usually very good and students are kept busy.

62 Students with SEN make very good progress in most lessons as a result of the high quality of the provision. They are in smaller groups and teachers are very well aware of the difficulties of individuals. They provide them with suitable tasks and give them additional individual help whenever possible. Support is used very effectively. SEN and lower attainers in Year 7 enjoyed using a commercially produced learning device to consolidate their work on magnetism and in doing so developed their independent learning skills. However in a lesson with a group of Year 9 students with a high proportion of those having special needs there was no support and the teacher was unable to meet the immediate demands of individuals and some became restless and disinterested. Teachers are using ICT much more than at the last inspection and in one lesson Year 8 students competently accessed a computer program to obtain relevant information on energy resources and then word processed their accounts. In another the teacher involved Year 10 students while demonstrating data logging equipment to further understanding of acceleration. There is, however, not enough of this equipment to provide sufficient opportunities for 'hands on' experience. Praise and encouragement used frequently promote confidence in students to volunteer ideas. Teachers sensitively correct misconceptions. Many informative comments on marked work help students move forward. One teacher very effectively uses evaluation sheets for students to complete at the end of a topic.

63 Teachers are appropriately qualified and have a good balance of experience. A newly qualified teacher is receiving excellent support. Another technician has recently been appointed and the technical support is of high quality. The newly appointed head of department has already shown clear leadership. Strategies already identified together with co-ordination and dissemination of good practice throughout the department should lead to much improvement. There has been a slight improvement to the accommodation since the last inspection but most laboratories need refurbishment - two are very small and some others do not have all mains services on central benches. The success of a practical lesson with a large group in very cramped conditions results from the management skills of the teacher and the positive behaviour of students. There is a shortage of text books and students do not have personal copies for use at home.

ART

64 GCSE results are above the national average across A - G grades. They are below average for the higher grades A*-C. Girls' results are significantly better than boys' and in-line with the national average for higher grade passes in three dimensional art and general art. Boys' results are significantly below average in three dimensional art, general art and textiles. In graphic art they are well above average in the higher grades.

65 At the end of Key Stage 3, students achieve standards that are broadly in-line with the national average. The quality of work by many individuals is good although there is limited time provided for art at this key stage. Standards are below average in classes containing a wide ability range where tasks are demanding in both intellectual and practical skills. The art curriculum has sufficient breadth and students gain experience in tasks that develop both expression and objectivity in their work. There is good attainment in classes where teachers provide for a range of interpretations, for example in a Year 7 class, where outcomes varied from expressive work based upon fantasy to objective studies drawn and painted from close observation. Students develop good technical skills in three-dimensional art where, for example in Year 9, each made a large slab pot in clay. Students are capable of working through a design process from an initial idea through to a completed millennium pot. SEN students achieve good standards in all art areas; they are confident in their abilities and paint, model and print using well-established skills. All students learn and use correct terminology, this is evident when they talk about how they have planned and made their work. In a Year 8 textiles class, students described how they developed a self-portrait into a block print cut into lino. The art curriculum provides for an appropriate ICT input at all stages. In Year 8, students are able to scan cartoon characters and place them into photographs taken with the digital camera. At Key Stage 4, students achieve satisfactory results overall and exceptional standards in some areas. Limited curriculum time does not allow the majority of students to fully achieve their potential. Students who make regular use of art facilities outside lesson times achieve good results. This was in evidence during the lunch break when students use the art facilities; Year 10 students made use of the department's computers to develop their ideas for a project on fruit and vegetables. In lessons there is work of good quality in three-dimensional art where students are able to use clay to create surrealistic sculptures based on the work of Salvador Dali. Students are competent in the technical skills relating to art and design and use printing, embroidery and appliqué techniques in the textiles products they have designed.

66 At the time of the last inspection time for art was lower than the national recommendation; this has not been addressed and limited time affects standards. GCSE results in the higher grades have fallen since the last inspection when they were good. The quality of teaching has improved and teachers employ a broad range of strategies in their lessons, an area criticised last time. The department has responded to the need to strengthen curriculum links with feeder schools. They have organised strong curriculum links and Key Stage 2 students are invited to work with the art department on a visit prior to joining the school.

67 Teachers are well qualified and cover a broad range of specialisms. They use their knowledge to good effect within the classroom, particularly when teaching techniques such as textile printing, ceramics and ICT applications. In Year 8, students demonstrated their understanding of fabric printing when making large banners using block-printing techniques. They know how to plan the composition of their banner and to balance the colours, shapes and textures to improve the quality of their work. Teachers understand

and integrate ICT into art lessons, as in Year 8 where students learn animation techniques using articulated characters and scanning equipment. Subject matter is appropriate to students' age and ability. In Year 7 the class responded enthusiastically to the task of creating a surprise picture hidden behind a closed door. The teacher involved the class in discussion of how the subject could be explored and interaction was rich and imaginative. These strategies improved the quality and breadth of interpretation. One door opened out onto a graveyard full of ghouls, and another opened to reveal a room with books and a large brown bookworm curled up on the carpet. There is very good departmental leadership which provides support and guidance to well-motivated teachers. Homework is set weekly as in Year 8 where students researched the work of expressionist artists and all work is marked regularly. They wrote and illustrated extended essays about artists and the style of their work. Day-to-day assessment is of a good quality; teachers' comments are detailed and support individual learning. Teachers have a good and thorough understanding of their students and use this to motivate them in their work; for example, in Year 9 where a SEN student was encouraged to attend lunchtime sessions to complete a patterned skirt based on 'Sea Life.' Examination students are set challenging learning targets. They are made aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and know what they need to do to improve. Teachers involve students in whole class evaluations of work, and provide examples of past work to illustrate how grades can be improved. Key Stage 4 examination classes include the full ability range, including SEN and higher attaining students which places serious restrictions on the range and depth of discussion that can be developed in the time provided. Good preparation and student management skills are necessary in these classes, as for example where the teacher organised the class into teams to take responsibility for handing out and collecting work and tools.

68 The quality of art accommodation in graphics and three-dimensional art is very good but there is an urgent need to re-furbish the textiles area.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

69 Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with standards nationally. On entry to the school, students have a basic understanding of DT although the range of their experiences is quite wide. By the end of the key stage most students have a sound knowledge of the design process and have had experience of working in a range of materials. They have developed competencies in the areas of textiles, food and resistant materials. Overall students' attainment in Attainment Target Two, Making is slightly better than their attainment in Attainment Target One, Designing.

70 At the end of Key Stage 4 attainment is in line with that seen nationally. GCSE performance at A-C grades closely matches national figures and has done so for the last three years, although there has been a marginal improvement each year. Overall results are influenced by the number of short courses offered, with individual subjects impacting on the average, for example in 1999 students taking Graphic Products gained 47% A-C grades while those taking Home Economics achieved 27%.

71 At Key Stage 3 students make good progress developing their knowledge and understanding of the design process together with the skills to produce quality products. Year 7 students' produced a chocolate cake using microwave ovens, and drew on prior knowledge to prepare a suitable mixture. In the CDT area, students designed handles to accommodate a hacksaw blade and paid attention to ergonomics in their design work. The production process gave them experience of casting in aluminium. Year 9 students were

involved in a design and make task to develop a moisture sensor which called for an understanding of how to house electronic components, avoid possible damage and join materials to ensure appropriate durability.

72 All students in Key Stage 4 take an aspect of DT and further develop skills gained in the previous key stage. They are able to use a wide variety of techniques when working with a broad range of materials. In home economics students investigate different cultures, carrying out research into dishes from different countries. Higher attainers use a variety of sources, including the Internet to gather relevant and recent information to create appropriate dishes. In graphic products students use ICT to develop designs for a project on wine bars. Using CAD software they were able to produce a number of alternatives on a basic design. Good examples of modelling techniques were seen in a Year 11 group making restaurant models. Students were able to explain the processes followed and the construction techniques being used. The quality of products is broadly in line with those produced by pupils at a similar age in other schools. However, a greater level of accuracy in working drawings should be achieved by some students. The emphasis placed on the development of making skills enables students to increase the complexity of their designs by combining a range of different materials.

73 In both key stages students with special needs achieve appropriately and in some instances better than expected, particularly when they are involved in the making phase of a project. In one lesson a student gained full marks for his project, producing and displaying a cook-chill pasta dish suitable for vegetarians.

74 Teaching is a strength of the department. It is always satisfactory and good in four-fifths of lessons. All teachers have good knowledge and understanding of their subject. They make good use of their knowledge of industrial applications to enhance their teaching and stimulate the interest of the students. In good lessons teachers are clear about their objectives for the lesson and explain them clearly to students. They provide clear instructions, demonstrate techniques the students are required to use skilfully, judge the pace of the lesson effectively and reinforce the use of correct technical language. In the least effective lessons teachers provide insufficient challenge for students and allow time to be wasted on inappropriate activities such as simple colouring tasks that could be completed in the student's own time. Teachers have good knowledge of students including those with SEN and the exceptionally able. They use this knowledge to ensure that appropriate provision is made to meet individual needs. Relationships between staff and students are good in both key stages. On the rare occasions when safety standards were likely to be compromised, the teacher quickly and effectively took corrective action. Overall student management is very good within the department.

75 Students are enthusiastic and keen to attend lessons. The busyness of the CDT area outside lesson times is evidence of the commitment of students. Interest and concentration are good, fluctuating only when challenge is lacking. Most students are well aware of safe and hygienic practice, taking personal responsibility seriously when working with food or machinery. Lapses in standards overall, are limited to a small number of unthinking students rather than a result of deliberate acts.

76 Curriculum organisation and overall balance are sound with further changes planned to replace the short courses that are proving inappropriate to the needs of students. Key Stage 3 students have the opportunity to experience food, textiles, resistant materials, graphic products and control. The department is meeting National Curriculum requirements, providing a good foundation for the transition between the key stages. At Key Stage 4 students continue to develop their skills through a compulsory short course

and for some, an additional full GCSE. All students working in the CDT area gain experience of CAD/CAM using the recently equipped ICT facility. Students on food based courses do not have access to ICT, a situation which the head of department is seeking to rectify.

77 This is a good, well-led department that benefits from a mix of long serving and recently appointed experienced staff effectively deployed. The senior manager ensures that teaching is monitored and effective planning is in place. The whole department is involved in a comprehensive system of monitoring student performance, to raise standards. Effective teachers, quality accommodation and good resources provide a sound basis for continuing improvement.

78 Since the last inspection the department has made improvements. Although results remain variable the amount and use of data analysis has helped inform the development planning within the department. Course changes together with improved monitoring will provide the basis for continuing improvement. Students' understanding of the design process has improved with the more integrated approach adopted across the department. Students receive a similar message in all areas of DT. Teaching has improved and is now a strength of the department. Students are highly motivated and expectations are high. Differentiation is mainly through effective intervention and support which meets the needs of SEN and exceptionally able students. Improvements in staffing, accommodation and resources have all contributed to the improved provision for DT within the school.

GEOGRAPHY

79 From a not always secure start in Year 7, students make good progress in geography and, by the end of Key Stage 3 have a broadening geographical knowledge, experience of using a wide variety of geographical skills and increasing competence in handling and interpreting data. Attainment is in line with national expectations. Geography is a popular option subject for GCSE. Students continue to make good progress through Key Stage 4 and results in GCSE are better than the national average with no distinction between the performance of boys and girls. In 1999, 58.8% achieved grades A*-C against a national average of 53.1%. There were slightly fewer top grades. At this stage, students often have a secure grasp of subject knowledge and sufficient understanding and fluency in skills to generate worthwhile coursework. In the past three years, results have drawn a little closer to national averages reflecting a laudable policy of extending the entry and reducing the numbers entered solely for the Certificate of Achievement.

80 The quality of teaching does vary but much is good or very good. The lesson which had the greatest impact on learning began with a crisp resume of key words, Japanese location and terminology and took a Year 9 class, as planned, into an awareness of the lack of raw materials in Japan and via a well used piece of video to a role play exercise on building a nuclear power station on Wakasa Bay. The unrelenting pace and challenge stretched the students whose concentration never faltered. They were able to draw on newly acquired and previous knowledge and understanding to put together cogent and telling arguments for and against the project and were relaxed and confident in expounding them to the class. The teaching of lower attaining and SEN students, especially in Key Stage 3, is a strength of the department. A Year 7 lesson, for example used aspects of weather as a vehicle to develop literacy and oracy. Teaching here is successful because experienced teachers use appropriate strategies and adapt materials but not all teaching

grasps the opportunities that banding and setting demands and there are instances of similar material and similar approaches in use across year groups so that some teaching underestimates the capacity of higher attaining students to be challenged. Precision and reinforcement are not always strong so that, for example, one group of Key Stage 4 students was insecure in drawing the link between flash floods and the mechanisms of intense rainfall and could not quantify descriptive terms like hot and wet.

81 Students are generally courteous and well behaved, work collaboratively in group situations, show interest and respond well when required to work independently. Written work is generally of a high standard as evidenced by the attractive and ever changing displays of students' work in geography classrooms which is a real strength of the department.

82 Since the previous report, teaching styles have diversified very considerably and there is much planned use of ICT. Assessment is now a strength and self evaluation a regular aspect of end of module procedures.

83 The department is ably led and adopts a team strategy. The curriculum is well planned and schemes of work organised so as to include progression. Effective arrangements for monitoring teaching and for subject review might usefully be developed to bring about a sharing of good practice, ironing out discrepancies in the quality of learning across year groups and so raising standards still further.

HISTORY

84 The quality of teaching in history is good and sometimes very good. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. Even when non-specialists deliver the subject, teachers are well prepared and know the topic well. There is an appropriate reference to contemporary source material from the start of Key Stage 3. The skills of interrogating pictures and written sources are gradually developed during Key Stage 3 and reinforced in Years 10 and 11. Average and above average students should start to develop skills much earlier so that by the time they start the GCSE programme, they are more adept in using source interpretation skills. All staff manage students well and set good standards for behaviour, encouraging students to observe the normal classroom routines. Need for reprimand is rare. Teachers use appropriate teaching techniques and make good use of visual material. They present students with well-paced lessons and varied activities to maintain interest and concentration. Teachers have high but realistic expectations. Good questioning techniques encourage students to think more deeply about the subject matter. Higher attainers are often very perceptive in oral sessions but frequently fail to transfer their perceptions to their written classwork. Teacher explanations are clear, short and students know what they are expected to do. Staff have an impressive knowledge of students' attainment and needs. They usually provide effective, additional individual support to make sure that all are involved. Most students are taught in groups arranged by ability. The common curriculum is presented in an appropriate manner and the lowest attainers have learning tasks appropriate to their capabilities. Basic literacy and numeracy skills are integrated with the history content in lessons for the lower attainers. Most students are challenged to achieve their potential but there is a need to ensure that average attainers in both key stages include sufficient factual detail in their written work to support their interpretations and conclusions.

85 Generally good teaching together with positive student attitudes promote good standards of learning. For the most part, students are attentive, co-operative and responsive. Most students maintain concentration, even at the end of a long day. A few find this difficult in the lower ability groups in Key Stage 3. Most students follow the agreed classroom routines and behave well. This applies across the range of age and ability. When given the opportunity to do so, they work well in pairs and groups. Relationships with teachers and other students are sound. The general working ethos in lessons is positive and relaxed but nevertheless focused on the task in hand, with students co-operating well with the teacher and with each other.

86 The good teaching promotes good learning. There is sound development of historical skills such as the ability to extract information from contemporary pictures and short written sources. There is a growing appreciation, particularly in Key Stage 4, that although historical sources are of value to the historian, some are more reliable and valid as evidence than others. Students with SEN make good progress, helped by teachers' support, care and knowledge of their needs. Higher attainers develop effective research skills. Most students confine themselves to given sources such as the textbook and school based reference material. The highest attainers use a wider range including CD ROM and Internet material and use good word processing skills to improve the presentation of their course work.

87 The standard of attainment is generally above average by the end of Key Stage 3 as indicated by teacher assessments compared with national statistics. Analysis of recent work indicates that these assessments are largely realistic. By this stage, most students have learned to extract relevant information from given contemporary sources. Most have developed a sense of time and sequence. They are able to fit historical events into a chronological framework. The best work shows that students appreciate the linkage between short-term cause and effect. They are able to appreciate the circumstances of past times. Work on the 1665 London plague often indicates a degree of empathy with past conditions and an ability to compare with modern circumstance and conditions. Standards are in line with national averages at the end of Key Stage 4. In Key Stage 4 those students studying history and geography, take the GCSE social and economic syllabus. The majority study the modern world scheme. Both cohorts make steady progress but do not always translate this into the examination success they deserve. Examination results have fluctuated considerably and there is no consistent pattern in the attainment of boys and girls. In the recent 1999 examination, although the overall attainment across the full range of A*-G grades was higher than the national average, (against the trend in results for all subjects in the school), attainment in the A*-C range was below national figures and lower than attainment in the previous year. This is partly due to variations in the ability of the students opting for this subject. Even so, students do not always justify all of their views and opinions by detailed reference to relevant, supporting factual knowledge and show appreciation of longer-term links between apparently diverse events in their written work. The current revision sessions are a useful way to consolidate learning but the mentoring of students who are on the C/D borderline is a longer term process and should be viewed as such.

88 Leadership and management of the subject are very good. There is professional team approach to the subject based upon agreed, shared aims and objectives. Assessment procedures are sound and consistent. Assessment is used not only to diagnose individual attainment but also to monitor the impact of teaching and the delivery of the curriculum. Prudent management has built up the range of resources so that now provision is generally good, with a range of textbooks, videos and reference material suitable for the range of abilities. A significant development is the carefully planned use of

information technology. From Year 7, students are taught the skills to exploit this technology in their research and work presentation. Development planning is effective and provides the basis for prioritised bids for funding.

89 The department has continued to build on the good position outlined in the last report. The challenge is now to develop strategies to secure more consistently high attainment at the end of Key Stage 4.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

90 At the end of Key Stage 3, students achieve National Curriculum levels that are slightly above the national average. Girls perform a little better than boys. GCSE examination results have improved steadily over the past three years and achievement in the higher grades is above average. Girls outperform boys.

91 By the end of Key Stage 3, students achieve good computer skills through cross-curricular applications, discrete ICT lessons, and within the PSE programme. They have well-developed keyboard and mouse skills and are confident users of ICT. They are able to use word processing and desktop publishing (DTP) software to write essays and in the presentation of their work. In a Year 8 art group, a student used accurate word-processing and graphic skills in a homework assignment on the work of Vincent Van Gogh. A broad range of applications is used in cross-curricular work, as in mathematics where Year 9 students used competently Omnigraph to plot graphs. In a discrete ICT lesson, Year 9 students were able to use a computer to control an on-screen traffic light system. Higher attaining students applied investigation techniques when they synchronised the lighting sequence on a narrow bridge. SEN students achieve good standards. For example in a Year 9 music lesson where low attaining students used 'Cubasis'. They composed confidently using a gamelan format. At the end of Key Stage 4, students achieve good standards. They follow a broad and challenging ICT programme that includes computer aided design (CAD), spreadsheets and information seeking techniques. Applications are used to solve real problems; for example, when an outside speaker from a local bank set Year 11 students the task of organising a menu for a large function. They were able to record costs and profit using a spreadsheet. The majority of students are able to use graphics in their work, as in DT where Year 10 students effectively employ 'TechSoft' design to plot two-point perspective and isometric drawings. SEN students achieve good standards in all lessons observed and are provided with appropriate differentiated materials. For example, low attaining students in a Year 11 class used a pre-formatted sequence when using 'Powerpoint' for a presentation. All students are able to research projects through Internet and CD ROM connections. Statutory requirements are fully met at both key stages.

92 The issues raised in the last report have been addressed. Cross-curricular coverage, particularly in music, science and geography, were under-developed last time. Cross-curricular coverage of ICT is now a strength. There has been a review of accommodation and computers are sited throughout the school, including two large computer suites and dedicated computer bases in mathematics, DT and art. The ratio of students per computer is 9:1 and above the national average. The school has extended the network since the last inspection, it has also developed the use of Internet facilities across the school. Liaison with local primary schools was under-developed last time, this weakness has been addressed and regular liaison meetings take place with the main

feeder schools.

93 The co-ordinator provides dynamic leadership to deliver ICT across the school curriculum. Teachers are well qualified in the use of ICT and use their knowledge to provide challenging tasks and projects. Subject ICT co-ordinators monitor the quality and content of ICT skills within each department. The procedures for marking and assessment are effective and the information gained is used to set individual targets for students. This was observed in a Year 9 class when the ICT co-ordinator set higher attaining students extension activities in a lesson on computer control. ICT requirements are written into all schemes of work. In a Year 11 geography class, the teacher used his knowledge of Internet sites to set a research task for GCSE students. The class studied a site that provides information on major earthquakes. Students studied causes and effects relating to a major earthquake and planned the actions of an emergency services team. The ICT department provide classroom support in a majority of whole class lessons. This was observed in a Year 8 science class, where the teacher used an interactive programme on elements, compounds and mixtures to review and consolidate laboratory learning. The ICT support teacher used his expertise to enable students to use the programme effectively, and the science teacher was able to concentrate on the science. Subject teachers are responsible for teaching subject-specific ICT skills, as in a Year 10 graphic art lesson where the teacher introduced 'Photoshop' software. Students learned how to scan drawings and paintings of fruit and vegetables, then combine them into their postage stamp designs. Students respond positively to good and effective teaching. This was observed in a GCSE information technology class where students used 'Powerpoint' to layer images and text in a presentation based upon a subject of their choice, for example The Brit Awards. Teaching motivated the class using a short demonstration. The introduction was clear and concise and constructive questioning techniques to involve students in a whole class discussion were used. Students have positive attitudes towards ICT and it is popular within the school. High numbers attend computer clubs. There is a weakness in some science lessons, where teachers demonstrated datalogging techniques, but did not provide sufficient opportunities for students to gain 'hands-on' learning.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

94 In both French and German standards of attainment are well in line with expectations by the end of Key Stage 3. Strong teaching ensures that most students are well motivated and achieve the standards of which they are capable. Many are capable of simple dialogues in the foreign language and understand their teachers' instructions well, especially when the language is used consistently. In one Year 9 lesson, for example, students spoke in quite fluent French to request hotel accommodation and had very good comprehension of native speakers on tape. These students responded eagerly to engaging and rigorous teaching that gave them ample opportunity to use French actively and build on their successes. Lower attaining students and those with SEN are also attaining good standards of work, and respond well to challenging teaching. Students' reading skills are promoted by good opportunities to read freely and at their own pace in the foreign language.

95 GCSE examination results in French improved over the past three years to the point where, in 1999, the A*-C grades were well above the national average. German results at GCSE, at around the national average, are equally commendable given the smaller proportion of high attaining students taking German over the past few years. These strong results should also be seen in the light of the school's policy of entering all but a very small

number for a foreign language at GCSE. The percentages achieving the highest grades A* and A have been rather lower than the national average.

96 Standards in lessons at the end of Key Stage 4 are well in line with expectations in both French and German. At the highest level students are capable of spoken and written responses which are fluent and accurate, using complex grammar to describe future plans and past events. Middle and lower attainers have difficulty with writing in the foreign language and need close guidance. Students' listening skills at all levels are in need of greater development.

97 The quality of teaching is satisfactory or better in almost all lessons. In half of the lessons observed teaching was very good or excellent. In most cases teachers are very proficient in the languages they teach, even in their second language. This generally promotes consistent and sensitive use of the foreign language in the classroom, resulting in a good level of comprehension by most students, and, in many cases, commendable accent and pronunciation. In cases where the language is used inconsistently and students are not expected to use it routinely for everyday requests in the classroom, they are less confident at speaking.

98 Most teaching is rigorous and well organised, using engaging methods to gain and keep students' interest and promote strong learning. Skilful artwork and the very competent use of resources, most of them home-made, are a particular strength of the department's practice. The reading programme, the teaching of good dictionary skills and an increasing use of ICT further enrich the quality of students' learning. Teachers manage students very well and have a friendly professional rapport with them. This, in turn, creates a busy ordered atmosphere in which students are motivated to work responsibly and feel comfortable to express themselves. In a Year 11 German lesson, for example, all students, boys as well as girls, made strong headway in holding short dialogues in a train station. They responded positively to very sensitive and well managed teaching that gave plenty of opportunity to practise the new language and kept them busy at all times. Students' attitudes and behaviour at such times are exemplary. They rise to the challenge of demanding teaching, co-operating with the teacher and each other, listening attentively when appropriate and working independently without undue reminder. Restlessness or lack of concentration are rare, usually resulting from a lapse in teaching rigour, such as unclear instructions or misjudged timing of an activity.

99 In some cases the effectiveness of teaching, and students' learning, would be even further enhanced if all members of the department had a similar approach to certain items of good practice: a rigorous insistence on students using the foreign language for simple requests and on testing learning of homework; a brief statement of the lesson's aims at the start and revisiting them at the end; a fuller use of listening texts for teaching as well as testing comprehension; more open-ended tasks, in class and for homework, to stretch those who work quickly; a more systematic use of repetition, both collective and individual, for practising new language.

100 The department benefits from very effective and clear-sighted leadership which promotes high standards and reflects well the school's aims. Relationships between staff are very cordial and supportive, encouraging frequent dialogue and sharing of ideas and resources. Certain key roles, such as the promotion of ICT in foreign language learning, are appropriately delegated to other members of the department. There are considerable benefits from the employment of assistants to help with conversation in French and German.

101 Staff have made the most of the languages area by producing some very attractive displays of students' work. Good numbers opt to study a second foreign language in Key Stage 4 and subscribe to the excellent programme of visits and exchanges to Germany and France. In addition to French and German, other languages such as Latin, Japanese, Spanish and Urdu are taught to keen linguists who are prepared, with the staff, to devote some of their free time to it. This is further evidence of the vigour of the foreign languages department and of the strong contribution it makes to students' cultural and linguistic development. Effective use is made of assessment to identify and target students under-performing in Year 10, and to adjust the composition of sets where appropriate.

102 The foreign languages curriculum is broad and balanced, and, through good setting arrangements, offers equal access to all students. In a number of cases, however, the sixty minute period is too long for the sustaining of attention and good learning, in spite of strong teaching, and valuable time is wasted in keeping students from losing concentration. Another effect of the long period is to space out unduly the two lesson per week allocation and to reduce the overall allocation of time to foreign languages to well below the national average for all secondary schools.

103 Two of the classrooms used by the department are some distance from the main languages suite, discouraging frequent communication or the use of resources which need carrying to and from lessons. One of these rooms needs blackout facilities to allow the use of the overhead projector or video; the other is in poor decorative order and has little display of students' work. In view of the widespread but rather uneven strengths of teaching within the department, there would be benefits from more systematic monitoring of teaching.

104 Since the last inspection the department has made good improvements in a number of important areas. Attainment remains sound with improvements in GCSE results. Students with SEN make better progress through sensitive teaching and good support in class. The recommendation for foreign language assistants has been met to the benefit of students and staff. The use of ICT has been further developed. Most importantly, the quality of teaching, and thereby the rate of progress and learning, has improved from merely sound to good overall with many lessons of very high quality. In view of the department's effectiveness and its openness to change, it has the capacity to make further improvements.

MUSIC

105 Results in the most recent GCSE examinations were significantly higher than the national average, and have been so consistently in recent years. Standards of attainment are good at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. By the end of Key Stage 3, students have developed good composition and performance skills. When composing, they have a basic knowledge of concepts of tempo, dynamics, volume and form, and use these with authority to create specific effects. Co-ordination in ensemble work is especially good, as demonstrated in performances of Gamelan-style music, which included complicated off-beat and syncopated rhythms. When listening to and analysing music, students can make informed comments. A Year 8 class accurately discussed music by Ligeti using appropriate musical vocabulary. The students then successfully used this music as a model for their own compositions, using graphic notation accurately.

A particular strength of the department is ICT which has been developed since the last inspection. Appropriate programmes are used for students, especially those at the

extremes of the ability range, to extend their skills and knowledge during lessons. At Key Stage 4, students have good standards of practical performance demonstrated in the fluent improvisatory work undertaken in the classroom. They use their ears well to identify chordal progressions, and can create adventurous melodic lines to the given sequences. The quality of singing across the school is very good, there are excellent extra-curricular choral groups. Singers project their voices well, enunciate clearly and interpret the music with gusto and evident enjoyment.

106 Students have good attitudes to music across both key stages, though in Key Stage 4 this is rather more evident in Year 10 than Year 11. The impressive take-up and obvious enjoyment of the extra-curricular provision also reflects attitudes to the subject across the school. In the classroom, attitudes are especially good where the teaching is good or better. Under such circumstances students are animated, work particularly co-operatively in groups, respond positively to suggestions for improvement, listen attentively and keep on target. They can be trusted to work productively in practice rooms. Those given opportunities to work independently in a separate room on computers do so responsibly, working in a focused way at the targets they have been set. Where teacher expectation is too high and inappropriate methodology is used, especially with low attaining groups, the attitude of a significant number of students is unsatisfactory.

107 The quality of teaching is very good at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 leading to good quality learning at both key stages. However, there is no common approach to teaching methodology within the department - this needs to be addressed as a priority. Where teaching is very good, there is an awareness of the ability and potential of each child, and arrangements are made for individual development - an improvement since the last inspection. Teachers have very good practical skills and put them to excellent use in class improvisation work at both key stages. The organisation and management of group work is very smooth and a wide range of relevant musical instruments is provided for such work. The choice of music for practical work is excellent, appeals to students, and enables them to develop a range of musical skills. Assessment is successfully undertaken both during practical work, and at the end of modules.

108 The music department attracts considerable public attention as a result of the quality of provision. This is due principally to the inspirational leadership of the head of department whose enthusiasm is reflected in the take-up of the many excellent extra-curricular activities, in the number of boys actively involved in the subject, and the level of enjoyment of music in the curriculum. There are inconsistencies in the way the curriculum is delivered between members of staff, and in the way assessment is undertaken. The curriculum is currently under review, and staff should work together to put any changes proposed by the head of department into effect in order for the department to move forward in a cohesive way. Accommodation continues to be a major problem, directly affecting the quality of students' learning. The whole suite of rooms is out of action during much of the summer term as it is above the school hall where examinations are taking place. There are too few practice rooms available for group work and individual practice, as was clearly evident when Year 11 students were observed endeavouring to record their course work. Music contributes strongly to the students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development both through the extra-curricular opportunities and through lessons.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

109 Overall standards of attainment are above average. At the end of Key Stage 3 both boys and girls exceed national expectations in most activities. By the end of Key Stage 4 skills in most games are well developed. There are currently no GCSE results against which to make comparison.

110 In lessons where standards are highest work is well planned, teachers set clear learning objectives and activities are challenging. The students respond positively and work well together in a consistent effort to improve. For example in Key Stage 3 the level of performance in both dance and gymnastics is raised above average expected levels by strong teaching. The task of building sequences of movement is clearly set, students understand what they need to do in order to make progress and they work eagerly to achieve their targets. By working together in pairs or groups their knowledge and understanding of both the quality of the movement and the degree of control that produces it are strengthened. This is reinforced by careful interventions by teachers to check on learning. The feedback from these examples of good performance, or inventive movements, serves as a model ensuring that all students know what to do in order to improve their own work. This way of working is most effective. Girls in Year 8 can sustain rhythms, produce inventive movements and combine them in sequences. Boys in Year 7 devise simple but strong balances and link them successfully with well-controlled rolls. Where teaching is weaker insufficient attention is given to the level of challenge in the tasks set. More consideration should be given to whether they are achievable by all, especially in groups where there are very large numbers and/or a wide range of ability.

111 By the end of Key Stage 4 most students have developed a clear understanding of the principles of physical fitness. Many know more about tactics and rules and are able to apply these to enjoyable games sessions. Learning benefits from very good relationships between teachers and students. Most teachers bring importance and relevance to the activities by their energetic and enthusiastic style of delivery. Students respond most positively and maturely in recognising how lessons are devised with them in mind by teachers who challenge them to improve and are sensitive to their needs. For example in a weight-training group in Year 11, a key objective was building self-esteem, making students feel good about what they were doing. This was achieved by affective teaching that helped the girls to set realistic targets, understand what they were trying to do and know when they had been successful. Their knowledge of their own level of personal fitness and their understanding of the effects of training routines are consequently raised well above average levels. This clear linking of physical activity and improved understanding of its nature and purpose is to be seen in most lessons in Key Stage 4 including those for examination groups. There is clearly good practice in combining theory and practical work and this approach is particularly effective for those with SEN. It enables them to make good progress. Many high attainers from most year groups achieve success beyond the school in a wide range of sporting activities. Both girls and boys take part in representative competitions at city, county and regional level.

112 The requirements of the National Curriculum are fully met. There is good practice in the arrangements for assessment at the end of Key Stage 3 with clear opportunities for student self-assessment. Arrangements for assessment recording and reporting overall are ready for further development. The department is aware of the need for assessment to play a more central role in the PE curriculum. This will enable closer links between learning objectives and performance criteria. It will also provide for more objective testing that will enable students and parents to judge more closely the nature of improvements. The head of department leads the team of teachers most effectively. The day-to-day organisation is

very good and the documentation provides a sound basis for the work. Although the head of department has good awareness of the strengths of the team this would be sharpened with the introduction of regularised monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching and thus ensure continuing good standards. The team of specialist teachers together with several non-specialists provide a very good range of extra-curricular activities. This programme is most popular and provides opportunities not only in sports but in outdoor and adventurous activities, Duke of Edinburgh's Awards Scheme and residential experiences.

113 The specialist accommodation for games is excellent. The school has full use of the Leisure Centre sports hall and astro-turf surface. The in-school PE provision does not match this level indeed the provision made for changing for both students and staff is unsatisfactory.

114 Since the last inspection overall standards have improved and in both key stages the overall level of attainment is above average. There is no variation in standards between boys and girls. The newly introduced GCSE course will provide a sharper focus for Key Stage 4 and for all the work of the department within and across the key stages.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

115 Students across the ability range achieve good standards in RE by the age of fourteen. They enjoy the subject and are notably positive in their attitudes. Their knowledge and understanding of Christianity is suitably detailed and they acquire a good introductory knowledge of Hinduism, Islam and Judaism, learning the correct terms and the key concepts. Students gain good insights into how the beliefs of people affect their values and their decisions in life. Lessons are made relevant to their own experiences so that they help students to see meaning and purpose in their own lives, and they make a very strong contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Year 9 has an emphasis on issues that relate closely to their personal development such as marriage, divorce and family life. A Year 9 student wrote that they learn that spirituality is all to do with "what makes people tick", what inspires them and what they believe is so important that it shapes their lives.

116 Good learning results from high standards of teaching and the careful planning of schemes of work. The schemes faithfully follow the Worcestershire Agreed Syllabus, and statutory requirements are met at this stage. This is not the case at Key Stage 4. Statutory requirements are not met in Years 10 and 11 for all those who do not study GCSE Religious Studies because there is insufficient time for the subject. The key issue of the last report drew attention to this but has not yet been addressed. Consequently standards are not satisfactory in the brief religious education components of the PSE course which all students follow. This is not a reflection of teaching, however. Teachers exploit their limited time opportunities very well. They have also selected the most appropriate topics from the locally agreed syllabus so students have the chance for brief consideration of 'the big questions of life' and some important ethical issues. Work is discursive rather than written. The low standards result from the lack of time for adequate study, and from a degree of apathy on the part of some students. Without accreditation and with little time, they conclude that the subject is not important. The ability profile of those who choose GCSE Religious Studies is weighted towards the lower end of the range and numbers are relatively low. Although standards are below the national average they are in line with the students' abilities and often they achieve better in this subject than in others. The teaching here is imaginative, expert and promotes learning well.

117 Teaching is a strength. All the teaching seen was at least satisfactory. Twenty per cent of teaching was considered good and fifty per cent was very good. Management was good in all lessons. Good features in the strong lessons were clear aims spelt out at the beginning giving a clear focus; an emphasis on students thinking for themselves; varied activities to give students the chance to work together productively, and resources that challenged students well, or extended their ideas if they finished quickly. A number of lessons began in a striking way that engaged interest very quickly. For example in a lesson on Christian perspectives on world hunger, students were given a ticket as they arrived and then were organised into a 'rich man, poor man meal' where one quarter of the students were given eighty per cent of the food which was bowls of crisps. Those with the least were quick to understand the situation of those who go hungry in the world. Occasionally the timing of lessons did not work out well, or resources were insufficient to support students on the tasks they were given. The banding and setting arrangements in the first three years allowed lessons to be appropriately pitched. In classes where there were students with special needs they and their needs were well known and given suitable care.

118 The department is well led and strives for high standards despite constraints. The subject leader is the only full-time specialist teacher. The standard of resources produced

in-house is high and they provide good support for the non-specialist teachers. The books used in the department are also of good quality. They are up to date and attractive and they are used well as a stimulating resource in lessons. Books have been bought for a range of ability levels so that all students can be adequately challenged and extended. There is a good artefact collection to stimulate learning. Teachers use both art and artefacts well. Religious understanding was achieved through the aesthetic in several lessons seen. In one lesson students looked at painting and sculpture, and listened to music and poetry. The curriculum is enriched by a number of special occasions such as Harvest Festival and the Multicultural Day, and also by visits. ICT skills are included in the curriculum although there is also some shortage of curriculum time in Key Stage 3. The library stock does not support the subject well. It is very limited, much of it is old, and there are not enough books for the department's work on world faiths other than Christianity.

119 There are plans to address some of the department's difficulties soon. All students will begin a short course in GCSE Religious Studies in September and it will be given the necessary time. Another specialist teacher will be appointed. The improved provision will enable the school to meet requirements for older students, and the key issue from the last report. The department clearly has the capacity to manage such expansion well.