

INSPECTION REPORT

DOROTHY STRINGER HIGH SCHOOL

Loder Road, Brighton

LEA area: Brighton and Hove

Unique reference number: 114580

Headteacher: Mr T Allen

Reporting inspector: Ian Stuart
19298

Dates of inspection: 19 – 23 November 2001

Inspection number: 199733

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 - 16

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Loder Road
Brighton
East Sussex

Postcode: BN1 6PZ

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Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr R Hook

Date of previous inspection: 18 – 22 May 1998

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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19298	Ian Stuart	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? How well are the pupils taught? The adequacy of accommodation. How well is the school led and managed?
9147	Susan Stock	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development; How well does the school cultivate pupils' personal development? How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
12499	Marie Durkin	Team inspector	English; Drama; English as an additional language	
3643	Derek Jones	Team inspector	Mathematics; Equal opportunities	
10561	Angela Fraser	Team inspector	Science	
11751	David Sutcliffe	Team inspector	Modern Foreign Languages	
3731	Bill Robson	Team inspector	Special educational needs	Assessment and monitoring of pupils' academic progress
10385	Keith Hopkins	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT); Design and technology	
18447	Ron Cohen	Team inspector	History; Business	The school's results and achievements
25748	Roger Moyle	Team inspector	Physical education	Links with the community
30344	Stephen Walker	Team inspector	Geography	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
4773	Peter Gilliat	Team inspector	Religious education	Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
31129	Jeff Pickering	Team inspector	Art	The adequacy of staffing resources
31660	Marianne Young	Team inspector	Music	The adequacy of learning resources

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Dorothy Stringer High School is a large comprehensive community school of 1,497 boys and girls aged 11-16. It is located in the northern part of Brighton and its pupils come from all over the city, with relatively few from the area immediately around the school. The pupils come from a very wide range of backgrounds and circumstances, which, taken together, give a balanced and diverse mix reflecting the cosmopolitan nature of the city. The attainments of pupils on entry are equally diverse with a much broader spectrum of attainments than is found in most schools. Important considerations for the work of the school are the significant variations between year groups in the mix of attainments, and variations in boys' and girls' attainments in different years. Within this complex picture, the overall attainments on entry of the present Years 10 and 11 were a little above average, and the present Years 7, 8 and 9 were above average. The school has 300 pupils with special needs, a proportion which is above the national average, though the 15 with a Statement of Special Educational Need is below average. The percentage of pupils speaking English as an additional language is low; most pupils are white, with only 43 coming from ethnic minority groups. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is broadly in line with the national average. The school, which has been oversubscribed in recent years, is about to embark on a very large building and refurbishment programme to provide accommodation fit for its needs.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Dorothy Stringer is a fine school. It has many strengths and some outstanding features, and it has comparatively few weaknesses. It is a truly comprehensive school, providing a very effective education for the vast majority of its diverse range of pupils. It is a vibrant and dynamic place, which is very well led by an outstanding headteacher and a talented senior management team. They are very ably supported by a large number of highly motivated and dedicated teachers and support staff, who make an effective team with a very good blend of youth and experience. The way large numbers of new teachers have been integrated into the life and ethos of the school is excellent. Most pupils are achieving results that are above what would be expected from their earlier attainments. Teaching is good at both key stages; few lessons are unsatisfactory. The attitudes and behaviour of most pupils are very good. The school provides good value for money, and there is a strong, shared commitment to further improvement.

What the school does well

- Leadership and management are very good, and there is a common sharing of the headteacher's clear vision for the school's further development.
- Pupils show very positive attitudes with very good relationships within a well-ordered environment and high standards of care and support.
- The curriculum, especially in Years 10 and 11 and including excellent extra-curricular activities, is imaginative, enabling many, including the highest attainers, to achieve very well.
- Teaching is good overall, with much that is very good or excellent.
- Provision for pupils' personal development is very good.
- The school is an inclusive community, committed to all pupils; induction and integration of new pupils and staff are particular strengths.

What could be improved

- At present, despite the best efforts of teachers and pupils, inadequacies in the school's accommodation, including access to the use of computers for work in subjects, adversely affect its work in some areas.
- Aspects of communications with parents, especially information about the curriculum and pupils' progress, need strengthening.
- More developments in the rigorous evaluation of teaching and pupils' learning are needed to help to raise standards further.
- The low attendance levels of a minority of pupils means that these pupils do not achieve as well as they should.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

There has been good improvement from an already strong position at the time of the previous inspection in May 1998. The number of pupils has grown very considerably, and the school has managed this increase very well despite enormous pressure on accommodation and space, and has seen an overall improvement in its results, partly, at least, from improvements in the quality of teaching. Management structures and systems have been strengthened so that the school's knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses is now better; however, there is still some way to go in refining the evaluation of teaching and learning, and target setting for pupils. There have been very considerable improvements in information and communication technology (ICT), though the success of the developments is now causing frustrations as some subjects have problems of accessing computers. Some concerns over attendance remain, but recently introduced and sophisticated systems to record and monitor attendance should help strategies to improve the attendance of some pupils.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved at the end of Year 11 based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	B	B	B	A	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E

Over the last three years, the overall average points score in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 has been above average. In 2001, boys' results were well above average in all three of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, with particularly high results in science. Compared with similar schools, all results were well above average in 2000 and 2001. Achievement is good; the results show standards to be above what would be expected from the pupils' attainments on entry, with a rising trend similar to the national trend. Boys have achieved particularly well. Standards in work seen during the inspection reflect recent test scores except in design and technology, where standards are below average in Years 7 to 9. At GCSE, over the last three years, overall results have been above the national average, and well above compared with similar schools. The upward trend is slightly below the national trend. There have been variations in the relative performance between boys and girls which are not always explained by differences in attainment on entry. Overall, however, pupils have achieved well as they have obtained better results than would be expected from their attainments on entry. Present standards in Years 10 and 11 are also above average, and pupils are on course to meet the suitably demanding targets set by the school. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good in nearly all subjects; only in design and technology are standards below average, but achievement is satisfactory in relation to prior attainment.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Most pupils enjoy school, and are interested and involved in its activities.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Most pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school, including breaks and lunchtime when parts of the school are very crowded.

Personal development and relationships	Very good between pupils and with their teachers. Pupils work well together and show respect for others.
Attendance	Satisfactory and, overall, broadly in line with the national average. However, attendance is noticeably lower amongst some older pupils.

The positive attitudes, very good behaviour and personal relationships are great strengths of the school. Any problems, including instances of bullying, are dealt with very effectively.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11
Quality of teaching	Good	Good

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

Teaching is good at all levels, as is learning. During the inspection, unsatisfactory teaching was seen in only about one lesson in every 15 overall, but all of it was in Years 7 to 9. There is a very close link between the quality of teaching and the quality of learning with pupils responding very well to good teaching with very positive attitudes. Teaching is judged good in nearly all subjects, including English, mathematics and science. There are some inconsistencies within this good picture of teaching and learning between and within subjects, so there is potential for even higher achievements from pupils if all teaching and learning rises to that of the best. Good subject knowledge, infectious enthusiasm, high expectations and very good relationships are features of most teaching, whilst less successful lessons often lack pace and crispness, and do not challenge pupils sufficiently. Strategies to teach literacy and numeracy are good overall. Teaching in most lessons very effectively meets the learning needs of all pupils from the very highest attainers to those with considerable special needs.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The bold and innovative curriculum gives many opportunities that meet the needs of different groups of pupils, though a more than usual number of pupils do not take a modern foreign language or design and technology in Years 10 and 11. Very good overall.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good provision ensures that pupils with special needs make good progress. The Learning and Support Centres provide particularly good help for pupils who need very high levels of support.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good for the small number of pupils involved.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Very good. The richness of provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development contributes significantly to pupils' development as worthy citizens of the 21 st century. Moral, social and cultural development are particularly good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. Pupils are very well supported and cared for, and the monitoring of their personal development is very good, including good child protection and welfare provisions.

Overall, the school's partnership with parents is good.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher's outstanding leadership is very well supported and complemented by other key staff. The enormous commitment to the details of the initiative to transform the school's accommodation will benefit the school on a vast scale in the years to come.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. Governors share the strategic vision for the school's future needs, and they provide a wealth of experience and expertise for the school's benefit.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school now has very good systems for collecting data and evaluating its performance. It is successfully developing its action plans to further improve teaching and learning, and pupils' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses.
The strategic use of resources	Good. The seven priorities of the development plan are fully costed and the plan is regularly evaluated; there is good use of resources, including specific funding and special grants.

The school's expansion and staffing changes have required the recruitment of very large numbers of new teachers in the last two years. This has been managed extremely well, and the school has a highly talented staff capable of further development. Most accommodation problems should be resolved with the new building programme. Learning resources are satisfactory overall. Very good financial management ensures that the principles of best value are well applied.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school's high expectations of the work pupils will do. • The good progress pupils make. • The pupils' enjoyment of school. • The leadership and management of the school. • The school's approachability when problems occur. • The way the school helps pupils become mature and responsible. • The good range of activities outside lessons. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The way the school works with parents, including information about what is taught. • The quality of information provided by the school about how individuals are getting on. • The amount of homework set.

Most parents were very supportive of the school in their responses. Inspectors agree with the parents' assessments of the school's strengths. Despite some inconsistencies, inspectors believe that homework is well used and appropriate for most pupils. The quality of general information to parents is good, but some of the frustrations and criticisms of some parents of the quality of information about what is taught and how individuals are getting on, including reports, are justified. The school acknowledges this, and is taking steps to improve these aspects of its work.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. The school has detailed information about the standards of most pupils when they enter the school. For Years 7 to 11, results of national tests at the end of Year 6 are available from primary schools. However, the school makes extensive use of information it gathers itself from cognitive ability tests (CATs), and this information is available for nearly all pupils and for all years. An analysis of all the available information indicates that there is a very wide spectrum of attainment on entry, with more very high attainers and more very low attainers than would be seen in a normal spread of attainments. There have been wide variations year on year in the numbers of boys and girls; for example, the current Year 8 has almost the same number of boys and girls, whereas only 40 per cent of the current Year 11 are boys. There are also significant differences in the attainments of boys and girls in different year groups. On entry to the school, the differences in attainment between boys and girls of the current years 7, 9 and 11 are similar to those found nationally. However, boys' attainments current years 8 and 10 on entry were higher overall and close to the attainments of the girls. This means that averages need to be treated with some caution. Within these qualifications, standards on entry were broadly average for the current years 10 and 11, with somewhat more pupils above than below average; standards of the current Years 7 to 9 on entry were higher and were above average overall.
2. By the end of Year 9, the overall average points score of boys and girls in the national tests have been above average in recent years, with the trend broadly in line with the national trend. Since 1998, there has been no significant difference between standards in English, mathematics and science, though mathematics has been a little lower, and the relative performance of boys and girls has varied. This is most marked this year when boys did better than girls overall by quite a wide amount. In relation to the pupils' standards at entry, the results at the end of Year 9 in 2000 and 2001 show achievements that, compared to all schools nationally, are above average in terms of educational value added. When compared to similar schools, the school's performance in all core subjects was well above average.
3. At the end of Year 11, the overall average GCSE/GNVQ points score obtained by pupils has been above the national average over the past five years. The gap between the results of boys and girls in recent years, except 2001, is somewhat less than that found nationally, indicating better achievement by boys in the school than boys nationally in most years. In 2000 and 2001, there has been sound achievement when comparing overall GCSE points scores with the same pupils' test results two years earlier. When comparing pupils' performance at GCSE/GNVQ with that in other similar schools, standards have been well above average in 2000 and 2001. A notable feature of the GCSE results in recent years across almost all subjects is the large number of A* and A grades, which are well above the national average. In 2001, results were significantly above the national average in biology, art and design, business GNVQ, English literature, history, German, French, and music. Results were well below average in design and technology. Results in AS philosophy and ethics, a course normally taken by post-16 students, were above average and very high for the group of pupils taking the course.
4. In work seen in English, standards are above average. Pupils' achievements are good because good planning by teachers gives good opportunities to successfully use a range of techniques and skills in class work. Particular strengths are seen in oral work in all years. For example, a Year 7 class understood oral history and recounted their own stories with engagement and panache, while a Year 11 class discussed poems with knowledge and sensitivity. By Year 11, they read a wide variety of texts and successfully make complex inferences. They can use standard and non-standard English appropriately and are respectful listeners.
5. Literacy skills are above average overall. Pupils discuss their work enthusiastically and sensibly in most subjects and listen attentively. Writing at length is a feature in English, French and design and technology, and, because the teaching of basic literacy skills is taken seriously by most subjects, most pupils make improvements to their spelling, reading and writing skills.

6. Standards of work seen in mathematics are above nationally expected levels at the end of Year 9. In Years 10 and 11 they are also above expected levels. This indicates good achievement in both key stages, and reflects results in tests and examinations in Year 9, and building on those results in Years 10 and 11. During Years 7 to 9, pupils' skills are progressively developed in number, algebra, trigonometry and geometry. They become increasingly confident in using and applying mathematics in a variety of situations and in handling data.
7. The pupils' standards of numeracy on entry to the school are at the national average. As pupils move through the school, they make good progress; when they reach the end of Year 9, their numeracy skills are above average. Particularly during Years 7 to 9, pupils develop a range of number skills as part of the mathematics curriculum. Mental arithmetic exercises form part of mathematics lessons during this key stage and pupils are able to make appropriate use of calculators. Pupils, as part of the mathematics curriculum, also develop increasing confidence in handling problems involving money and measures, in methods of gathering numerical information and its presentation in graphs, charts and tables. Little use is made of numeracy in some subjects; however, in a range of others, pupils are able to work confidently with numbers. Pupils also show good levels of spatial awareness, for example, in aspects of the design technology work. Overall, their achievements in numeracy are good.
8. The standard of work seen during the inspection in science is similar to test and examination results, and is above the national average. Overall achievement is good; pupils make good progress both in lessons, and in the level of work in their books. By the end of Year 9, they have a good grasp of concepts, because teachers give pupils good practical experiences placing a strong emphasis on the use of scientific language. In Years 10 and 11, pupils' knowledge is good, and pupils have good standards of written work, presenting good reasoned arguments to explain experimental findings. Practical procedures are evaluated extensively, illustrating capable analysis. Achievement is improving Years 10 and 11 because the subject has made good use of assessment information to establish new programmes that match pupils' needs. In Year 10, for example, pupils following the GNVQ course become significantly more confident about their work.
9. In work seen in ICT by the end of Year 9, attainment is average in most strands of the National Curriculum, with the exception of control technology where progress is restricted by a lack of specialist resources. Standards reflect satisfactory achievement overall given these pupils' average attainment on entry in the subject. In Year 8, in the GNVQ course, which all pupils take, standards are well above average with particular strengths in pupils' ability to use spreadsheets to carry out calculations. Standards for the great majority of pupils at the end of Year 11 are average. Pupils studying the key skills course and GNVQ examination course in Years 10 are broadly similar to the average expectation; this represents satisfactory achievement over time given pupils' average attainment at the start of the course, though few boys and girls are achieving at the highest levels. However, in Years 10 and 11, whilst some subjects, particularly French, business studies and physical education, provide good opportunities for pupils to use computers to help their learning, this is not yet as comprehensive as it ought to be and limits progress and attainment overall by the end of Year 11.
10. Standards in art and design are above average. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 use a wider range of processes and materials than is normal, most using sketchbooks to investigate and plan future work. In Year 11, there is much inventive work of a high standard. At all levels achievement is good, with pupils building on their earlier work. In design and technology, by the end of Year 9, standards of work seen vary across the different material areas, but, overall, are below the national average. This represents satisfactory achievement overall given these pupils' below average attainment levels on entry into Year 7. Pupils are starting to understand the requirements of the design process but much of the work done is skills based and expectations of the design element vary across the subject. In general, pupils' making skills are better than their designing, and a high proportion of evaluations are underdeveloped. In work seen by end of Year 11 standards are below average overall. In food technology and graphics, most pupils are achieving well, and produce design folios that show satisfactory research and development of design ideas. However, in other design areas, too many pupils show a weak understanding of design processes and the expected conventions of design drawing.

11. In physical education, pupils make good progress at both key stages and attain standards which are above average, and which reflect the standards which have encouraged the bid for sports college status. For example in a Year 11 GCSE dance lesson, pupils performed sequences of movements which were characterised by good rhythm, timing and choreography. In geography, standards are above average through both key stages and pupils achieve well, reflecting continuous good progress in their work. Their use of extended writing is a particularly fine feature of their work in Years 10 and 11. In history, at the end of Year 9, standards in work seen during the inspection are above average; standards at the end of Year 11 are also above average. In lessons, pupils make balanced judgements, based on historical concepts, about the value of differing interpretations of historical events and developments. Pupils are gaining confidence when dealing with the complexities of analysis and evaluation, and they achieve well, making generally good progress in their work.
12. In some subjects, the school is innovative in its provision, and the pupils respond with very high levels of attainment. In modern foreign languages, fast-track French is introduced in Year 8, so that GCSE can be completed early. Pupils have made very good progress and are achieving very well, showing particular fluency in their writing. Overall standards in French and German are above average at the end of Year 9, and well above average by the end of Year 11. In religious education, an AS course is offered in philosophy and ethics, and pupils achieve very well. They make rapid progress in developing their skills to think through issues logically and rationally, and their standards are very high, with some outstanding extended writing from the highest attainers. In work seen by Year 11 in the GCSE short course, standards are above average, with pupils showing a thoughtful appreciation of moral and social issues. They also understand the relevant religious perspectives from the Christian and Hindu traditions. Their achievements are good. Standards in music at the end of Year 9 are broadly average, with no significant difference between boys and girls. A large number of pupils are supported in their learning by additional instrumental lessons and extra-curricular performing opportunities provided by the school, and this enables them to achieve higher standards. Standards at the end of Year 11, including performance and composing, are above average overall.
13. Pupils with special educational needs are achieving well. Many make very good progress, especially with overcoming social, emotional and behaviour difficulties, because of the sensitive support provided by teachers and classroom assistants. However, those with more severe literacy difficulties make slower progress. They do not receive sufficient regular tuition in basic literacy to improve their skills significantly. Although the school does not separately monitor the attainments and achievements of pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds nor those for whom English is an additional language, inspection evidence indicates that individual pupils are reaching appropriate standards and that they are achieving well, making progress similar to other pupils.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

14. Nearly all pupils in the school behave very well and have very positive attitudes to their work and to all that the school has to offer. The cornerstone on which these rest is undoubtedly the very good relationships, which pervade the school not only between the pupils but also between the adults and the pupils. Only very occasionally are pupils' attitudes less good leading to pockets of unsatisfactory and immature behaviour, but this is linked usually to less satisfactory teaching.
15. The keys to the many very good lessons seen during the inspection are the strength of the pupil teacher relationships and the high expectations of the teachers which create a fertile learning environment and contribute substantially to the progress pupils make. This in turn gives the pupils confidence to tackle challenging tasks and activities, for example, in a Year 8 music lesson when pupils investigated the complex rhythm patterns of African music and its role in African life and culture. Amongst the older pupils this is also the case, as seen in a Year 10 science lesson when pupils were encouraged by the enthusiasm and expertise of their teacher to use their own creativity and imagination to extend their learning.
16. The pupils have very good attitudes to their work. In lessons, pupils are well prepared and organised; they work cooperatively together and show respect towards their teachers and each other. They settle quickly to work, listen well, and show genuine enthusiasm and enjoyment in

learning; for example, in a Year 7 English lesson on creative writing, pupils were fully involved as a result of the lively and imaginative teaching. The very great majority of pupils are able to use their initiative to develop their learning because they want to do well. The pupils also have very good attitudes to their school as a whole and appreciate the many opportunities it gives them to take part in extra curricular activities. The personal development of the pupils is very good, and they contribute willingly to the school community of which they are justly proud.

17. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is predominantly very good. The majority of parents concur with this view. Around the school at break times, between lessons and at mealtimes in what are crowded areas it is noticeable how orderly, friendly and informal the atmosphere is, with pupils always willing to talk to and help visitors. In discussions, pupils have positive views about their school and were not concerned about bullying or intimidating behaviour; they have confidence in the school to deal effectively with any such issues. The school has a very low number of permanent and temporary exclusions compared with schools nationally, only one pupil having been excluded permanently in the previous school year. The pupils' very good attitudes, values and personal development make a considerable contribution to their learning and are reflection of the school's positive ethos.
18. Pupils with special educational needs make the most of the support they receive from learning support teachers and assistants. They concentrate well during lessons in which they receive individual tuition. Teachers and assistants treat them with respect and they respond well to this. They willingly discuss and agree targets for improving their work and behaviour with support staff and work hard to achieve them. Pupils show concern for each other's well being. For example, Year 7 pupils offered to help a boy with special needs in their class by forming a "circle of friends" to make sure that he found it easier to mix socially with other children.
19. Despite the very positive attitudes and behaviour of the vast majority of pupils, their overall attendance at 91.6 per cent is only just above the national average. There is a noticeable falling off of the average attendance rate as the pupils move up through the school because of unsatisfactory attendance by a small number of pupils; overall attendance is unsatisfactory in Year 11. However, the pupils' unauthorised absence is below national averages. The school recognises it must do more to encourage and sustain the attendance of some pupils and has taken steps to do so through improved monitoring and rewarding good attendance.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

20. The quality of teaching was a strength of the school at the last inspection. It still is, and, indeed, it has improved still further. Teaching is judged good overall, and much is very good with some excellent teaching. Teaching is satisfactory or better in over 14 out of every 15 lessons observed; it is good or better in nearly eight out of ten lessons, and very good or excellent in about one in three lessons. Teaching is unsatisfactory in less than one lesson in 15. Teaching is judged very good in timetabled ICT lessons in Years 7 to 9, and in geography and physical education in Years 10 and 11; teaching is excellent in the philosophy and ethics course in Years 10 and 11. In all other subjects and stages, it is judged good overall, except in design and technology where it is satisfactory. Overall, the quality of teaching is somewhat better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9 because of its greater consistency and lack of any unsatisfactory teaching. There is a close link between the quality of teaching and the quality of learning, with the good quality of learning also reflecting the very positive attitudes of pupils in most lessons.
21. The teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach is a real strength of nearly all lessons. Their confidence in their subject results in learning that encourages good understanding by pupils. In the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, for example, the teachers' deep knowledge comes through in many ways: as good mathematicians, teachers of that subject are able to use high quality question and answer sessions to develop pupils' intellectual skills; English and science teachers' enthusiasm and love of their subjects, as a result of their deep knowledge, are infectious and, as a result, a keenness to learn is seen in most pupils as they acquire their own skills, knowledge and understanding of the subjects. In art and design, teachers' very good knowledge means that lessons get off to a good start with very clear explanations that arouse pupils' interests, leading to high levels of concentration and the

ability to work independently. Similarly in religious education where, in many lessons the depth of teachers' knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject help to motivate pupils and engage their interest. For example, in a Year 8 lesson, the teacher's expert explanation of Jewish dietary laws, using good resources and well-judged examples, enabled pupils to understand the importance of 'keeping kosher'.

22. Teachers' planning is also a major strength which promotes good learning. In the best mathematics lessons, the learning flows naturally from the logical planning so that, for example, in a Year 10 lesson on Pythagoras' theorem, the pupils' learning was very good as they developed a clearer understanding of the concepts as the lesson progressed. Very good planning of an ICT lesson in Year 8 resulted in very good learning because the teaching matched the needs of a wide range of ability in the class; the teacher was very sensitive to different needs and made good allowances for the variable pace at which different pupils worked. He used very well the learning support assistant, who also had sufficient skills and knowledge to support all pupils in the class as necessary. Good planning in science means that pupils with special educational needs are very well catered for and feel fully included because the preparation of work for them is of a high standard. In most lessons, the teachers' ability to make appropriate provision for pupils of different levels of attainment in the class is a strength.
23. Most teachers use a variety of suitable teaching and learning methods to ensure that pupils are interested in their work, apply themselves diligently and that the pace of the lesson is good. In an excellent religious education lesson in the Year 11 course on philosophy and ethics, the pace of the lesson and the variety of activities ensured excellent learning. Very effective questioning highlighted key ethical differences, excellent explanation brought out differences between fact and interpretation; further precise and rigorous questioning, which was also supportive and encouraging, meant that pupils were constantly challenged to articulate their ideas, with the teacher's subtle humour and passion for the subject encouraging participation. This was followed by well structured group work that enabled pupils to investigate ethical dilemmas, and the excellent final whole group discussion challenged pupils' thinking from their group discussions, with the teacher's use of telling examples clarifying pupils' understanding. Excellent background notes prepared by the teacher ensured that pupils had a very secure reference and information base for the lesson. Overall, the breathtaking pace and intellectual rigour led to learning of the highest order. Whilst not all lessons match the excellence of this example, teachers' high expectations and varied teaching methods are hallmarks of much of the good and very good teaching that takes place in nearly all subjects. In science, for example, pupils develop good powers of concentration because expectations of their involvement are high. One Year 10 French class was involved in an excellent game which required both good organisation and good control and was effective in enabling pupils to practise all four language skills in a few minutes.
24. The teachers' management of pupils is very good, and this contributes very significantly to the quality of their learning. Similarly, very good relationships usually ensure that at least sound learning takes place even if there are other shortcomings in the teaching. In design and technology, good relationships between teachers and pupils ensure that a very pleasant atmosphere is generated and that learning takes place in a very caring environment. This also happens in lessons throughout the school.
25. Less successful and unsatisfactory lessons lack some of the characteristics of the good teaching described above. In most of the unsatisfactory lessons, there were difficulties with classroom management. In one English lesson, for example, the teacher's introduction was frequently interrupted by irrelevant observations by pupils, and the teacher did not have sufficient classroom control or subject knowledge to get full concentration from the pupils; later on, whilst most pupils were keen to express themselves orally and did so appropriately, they were not listened to attentively by some others who lacked self control. Where the pace and challenge of the lesson are low, learning is adversely affected. In one art and design lesson, for example, there was very little creative or intellectual challenge with pupils unaware of how what they were doing would help them develop. Similarly, in some design and technology lessons, because the tasks set are insufficiently challenging in an intellectual and creative sense, and the expectations of outcomes are too low, pupils achieve less well than they should. Because marking does not sufficiently focus on the design element of the work, pupils are less able to develop this important aspect of

their work. Features of good and less successful teaching are well illustrated in geography. In a number of lessons, the pace drops because teachers talk for too long and the pupils lose concentration; consequently, they do not learn as much as they should. However, in some other lessons, pupils respond well to structured assignments and work well on individual and group tasks; therefore, their learning is good. Some teachers inspire and challenge the pupils and this leads to considerable interest and engagement in lessons, and, therefore, good learning and achievement.

26. The quality of marking is generally good, but there are inconsistencies, and the main weaknesses in marking occur when teachers do not give pupils sufficient and clear direction about how they can improve their work. This applies to a number of subjects, though many are beginning to address the problems. So, for example, in science, pupils have clear guidance about test and examination criteria, but do not always understand how best to improve their work to raise examination success. Teachers are aware of this and want to introduce more detailed guidance for improving course work and enabling pupils to reach shorter-term goals. The use of homework is generally good, and there are many examples of good practice. In art and design, for example, pupils negotiate the quantity and quality of their homework; this helps good progress and learning because homework is appropriate to the needs of individual pupils. The lack of homework in physical education means that pupils' learning is held back because there are fewer opportunities to consolidate their work, and teachers make few comments on written work about how pupils could improve their work.
27. The teaching of basic literacy skills is taken seriously by most subjects and with the support of the English and special educational needs departments; as a result, pupils gradually make improvements to their spelling, reading and writing skills. Although there is no numeracy policy, strategies to teach numeracy skills are good overall, mainly because of the good teaching of basic skills in mathematics. Some other subjects teach basic skills well when appropriate; others miss opportunities to reinforce the skills. Teaching of ICT skills in timetabled ICT lessons is very good overall; however, in some years, such as Year 9, pupils' learning is restricted because of the low allocation of time, and the limited access to computer rooms for subjects across the curriculum, means that the effectiveness of teachers' use of ICT is reduced. Where it is used, it can be very effective. For example, in French it is very good, especially in Year 9; the booklet of ideas for the use of computers in that language is excellent.
28. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good. It is often very good when pupils are withdrawn from mainstream lessons for individual tuition by teachers and assistants. Support teachers and assistants make good use of assessment so that they understand pupils' needs very well. As a result, they help pupils to come to terms with their own needs, but also to understand their strengths. When teaching individuals, they provide a variety of suitable activities that interest pupils and keep them working at a good pace. They provide clear explanations to help them overcome difficulties they have experienced with work in mainstream lessons. In the support centre, staff manage pupils with emotional and behaviour difficulties very effectively. They help pupils with their problems but also ensure that they complete work from lessons from which they have been temporarily excluded. Support assistants provide effective individual help in mainstream lessons for pupils with a Statement of Special Educational Need. Subject teachers often make good use of the information provided for them in pupils' individual education and behaviour plans and help pupils to achieve their targets. For example, in physical education, teachers use oversize equipment, simplify their language and group pupils carefully so that all are included in lessons and learn well.

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

29. The school provides a curriculum that is bold and imaginative thus providing opportunities that meet the needs of different groups of pupils. The curriculum reflects the school's policy document that emphasises that appropriate courses are offered for individual pupils rather than similar courses for all pupils. The school conforms to the requirements of the National Curriculum, but there is a high degree of flexibility in Years 10 and 11 where the school recognises the importance of matching the curriculum to the differing needs of pupils. The overall quality and range of learning opportunities are very good, particularly in Years 10 and 11.

30. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is balanced and broadly based, and meets the statutory requirements for teaching all subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education. Drama is also taught as a separate subject in Years 7 and 8 and higher attainers can select an additional modern foreign language in Year 9. The requirement to include cross-curricular elements of ICT in schemes of work is not fully met in a number of subjects. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is highly responsive to pupils' needs and allows for the provision of specialist pathways. The school has taken advantage of its large size so that pupils can select from a wide range of options. However, following the school's interpretation of present regulations, an unusually large and significant number of pupils do not study a modern language or design and technology in Year 10 and 11.
31. The school operates a five period day on a two-week timetable pattern. The one-hour lessons have reduced movement around the school and help to create a calm, working atmosphere. Classes are taught in mixed ability groups in Year 7 and then the subjects have the option to set within two bands. The core subjects and options in Year 10 and 11 allow pupils to gain up to eleven GCSEs or equivalent qualifications. The school provides equality of access and opportunity for pupils to learn and to make progress at both key stages.
32. There are many aspects of the curriculum that are visionary and provide particular support for higher and lower attainers to achieve their very best. Over 50 pupils each year are now taking GCSE French in Year 9 as part of a 'fast track' programme. Philosophy and Ethics AS level, normally taken by students after the age of 16, has been introduced as a highly successful course in Years 10 and 11. The World of Work course has run successfully for a number of years for lower attaining pupils; it includes some vocational taster courses at the City College. GNVQ science with leisure and tourism is another alternative guided option that caters for the less academic pupil; inspection evidence indicates that it is very successfully fulfilling its aims. All pupils take physical education at GCSE, and religious studies is very successfully taught as a short course at GCSE as part of the common core of subjects taken by all pupils. The GNVQ ICT course is now taught in Year 8 to all pupils and will eventually replace the Key Skills course in Year 10. The introduction of many of these courses is pioneering and may point the way forward for future curriculum development in other schools.
33. Arrangements for promoting literacy and numeracy across the curriculum are good. The school's involvement as a pilot school in the national literacy strategy has helped ensure good provision in all subjects and in the library. Carefully censored Internet access allows pupils to research topics in detail, and key words are displayed prominently in most classrooms to help pupils build up their specialist vocabulary. Teaching of basic literacy skills occurs in most subjects. Although there is no overall school numeracy policy, the mathematics department is well into its development of the national numeracy strategy. Its teachers have been on training courses and the outcomes in many mathematics lessons are good as far as the teaching of basic skills is concerned. Whole school initiatives are planned, though, at present, strategies to teach numeracy vary in quality between different subject areas.
34. The pupils' personal, health and social education is very good. The school is committed fully to providing every pupil with the opportunity to take part in this well organised and well-taught programme. It is very aware of the importance of this area of its work and, to this end, has a team of specialist teachers, led by a very knowledgeable co-ordinator who deliver this aspect of the curriculum. All year groups have access to personal, social and health education which includes careers advice from Year 9, although there are aspects of preparing for the world of work included for Years 7 and 8, such as developing good work habits and thinking about the qualities needed for different types of work. The programme offered to the pupils is relevant and well planned and all pupils have hour-long lessons. The curriculum offered is supportive of the pupils' needs and is appropriate to their age; for example, in a Year 7 lesson pupils discussed in an open and mature way the question of bullying, being led sensitively by their teacher as they reflected upon its causes and outcomes.
35. The school makes good use of outside agencies to contribute to its personal, social and health programme, including the local police liaison officer, St John Ambulance Service and the school

nurse. In one lesson in Year 10, the police liaison officer led a discussion as part of the pupils' drugs education. This developed into a very animated lesson with pupils fully involved and keen to participate. There are good links with other subjects of the curriculum as well as external projects such as the Eco Schools project, its aim being to raise environmental awareness across the whole school community. This resulted in the school gaining full Eco School status. It is this imaginative and purposeful approach, which ensures that the personal, social and health education of the pupils remains stimulating as well as relevant to their needs; it is appreciated and valued by the pupils, and it makes a very good contribution to their personal and social development.

36. The programme of careers education and guidance is very good; it is successfully delivered through the personal, social and health education programme. The school focuses on pupils in Years 10 and 11; it provides them with a well-structured careers programme to introduce them to the world of work and further education, and it is very well co-ordinated by the head of personal social and health education. The school has a well-resourced careers library, which the pupils are encouraged to use both formally and informally. All pupils have access to advice from the local careers advisor. Pupils who require extra support have the opportunity for extra guidance to ensure they make the best of the opportunities available to them. All Year 10 pupils participate in work placements, although the monitoring of this is not entirely effective. However a good feature of work experience is the follow up essay written by pupils which consolidates the pupils' experiences and which forms part of their Record of Achievement. In recognition of the school's good provision, it has recently been re-accredited with the 'Committed to Careers' standard by the local authority.
37. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good across the school as a whole. The school meets the requirements for pupils whose needs are outlined in their Statements of Special Educational Need. In Years 10 and 11, the school provides a very good range of alternative courses and accreditation which meets the needs of pupils on the special needs register. The learning and support centres provide particularly good help for pupils who need high levels of support. For example, some pupils have individual tuition that helps them with basic literacy skills and with work from subjects that they find difficult. Several benefit from individual counselling and support to help them overcome emotional and behavioural difficulties. A lunchtime club in the support centre provides a valuable sanctuary for pupils who lack self-confidence and social skills. However, there is insufficient support for pupils with literacy difficulties after Year 7. Pupils with dyslexia do not have enough help to enable them to make significant progress with reading and writing. Several pupils without statements would benefit from in-class support to help them to achieve better, but this is not currently available. There is good provision for the small number of pupils with English as an additional language.
38. The school enriches its curricular provision through an excellent range of extra-curricular activities. It places considerable importance on this provision and the high rate of pupil involvement in the activities certainly enhances the positive ethos in the school. The school has a well-deserved reputation for music and drama. The school orchestras are well established and, at the time of the inspection, rehearsals were taking place for the school production of *Living with Lady Macbeth*. There is a wide range of sporting activities including inter-form competitions, school teams and the Sportsmark Gold Award. There is an impressive number of clubs including Chess, Boys' Reading Club, Italian Club, Young Enterprise, Christian Union, Gymnastics and the School Bank. There is a variety of field trips and visits arranged by the departments as part of the curriculum provision. There is a German Exchange and there are plans to develop an exchange link with a French school. The school has a field study centre at Dolawen in North Wales and this is used for fieldwork and outdoor pursuits. The school has recently developed an environmental area on the school site and many pupils are involved in this exciting conservation project that has led to links with primary schools, University of Sussex, and schools in France.
39. The school has constructive and positive relationships with the partner institutions. Feeder primary schools provide good transfer record documentation and the induction programme for pupils is well established. Mathematics, science and English have taken part in a Key Stage 3 Raising Achievement project that has led to very good links with the 25 primary schools. There are plans for greater physical education links through the Sports Organiser Award and proposed

Sports Specialist Status. However, curriculum links with primary schools are not generally well developed and this could be an area for future consideration. Links with Varndean Sixth Form College and the Brighton City College are well established and staff are invited into school to talk to Year 11 pupils and teachers attend regular meetings with the post-16 partners.

40. Since the last inspection report, the school has made good progress on the key issues that related to the curriculum. ICT provision is now in place through the Year 8 and 10 courses. Statutory requirements are now mainly met through the separate ICT courses. However, the control component of the ICT is only provided by the design and technology option at Key Stage 4 and a number of pupils do not take this option. Some departments are now using ICT through their schemes of work, but, at present, because of difficulties of access to rooms and computers, there is limited use of computers across many subjects. Indeed in art, at the present time, although the curriculum is broad, the situation is unsatisfactory because of lack of opportunities to generate or manipulate imagery with ICT.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

41. The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. A strong school ethos, based on mutual trust and respect, and characterised by very good relationships, provides a supportive context for these aspects of their personal development. The commitment and very positive attitudes of staff set a good example for pupils, not only in the classroom but also around the school and in extra-curricular activities. Assemblies contain an act of collective worship, and well-presented assembly themes, that draw on personal experience and engage pupils' interests, make a very good contribution to their personal development. The statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils is not met, as reported at the last inspection, because of the lack of suitable accommodation. However, the school does provide a 'Thought for the Day' on the monitor screens displayed around the school, which is appreciated by pupils.
42. Provision for spiritual education is good. Many subjects provide some opportunities for pupils' spiritual development. Spiritual awareness and insights are developed when reflecting, for example, on the way a metal skims around the surface of water in a science lesson or on the power of the natural world in geography. Pupils have opportunities to explore and extend their thinking about beliefs and values in some of their subjects, such as English, geography and history, and in assemblies and acts of worship. Work in art, music, religious education and dance also enables pupils to reflect and respond to topics in a personal way. However, planning for this aspect of pupils' education is under-developed which means opportunities are sometimes missed.
43. Moral education is very good. The daily life of the school and teachers' expectations successfully promote very positive values, and help pupils distinguish right from wrong. Valuable discussion on ethical issues and moral dilemmas takes place in a number of subjects, such as personal and social education, English and religious education, as well as assemblies. This encourages pupils to consider a range of viewpoints and to think about some of the choices they will need to make in life.
44. Social education is also very good. Pupils have many opportunities to develop social and collaborative skills in lessons, for example when working in pairs or small groups. Work in personal and social education, and in religious education helps pupils understand some of their rights and responsibilities as citizens. They can also participate in various aspects of school life; for example, Year 11 pupils take on responsibilities as prefects, form representatives serve on Year Councils and older pupils act as mentors to Year 7 pupils. Pupils are fully involved in the project to create an Eco Friendly Environmental Centre on the school site, and they also take initiatives to raise money for a wide variety of charities.
45. Provision for cultural education is very good and has improved since the last inspection. Opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of different cultures are well provided in subjects such as English, geography, religious education, art, music and dance. Work in music, for example, draws on material from a range of cultures, as in a Year 8 lesson when pupils played African drums and began to appreciate how they were used for different purposes and events in

village communities. Cultural interests and horizons are extended through the school's very extensive extra-curricular programme of sport, music, drama and other activities. Pupils are also given a wide range of opportunities to go on educational visits in this country, including to the school's outdoor residential centre in Snowdonia, and on trips and exchanges abroad.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

46. The school has good, effective systems in place to safeguard its pupils and ensure their welfare. There have been some improvements in its practice since the previous inspection.
47. Child protection procedures are good and all key members of staff have had recent training. There are clear lines of communication in place. A senior teacher is in the process of updating the whole school health and safety policy in order to review and improve its practices. There is good awareness of health and safety issues in subject departments which have a particular role to play in raising pupils' awareness to ensure their safety. The school has the Adventure Activities Licensing Authority award for its outdoor pursuits centre in Wales; this is indicative of the thoroughness of its approach. There is an appropriate number of staff trained in first aid and procedures for dispensing of medicines, recording accidents and caring for pupils who are unwell are all in place and work effectively. The school is vigilant in regard to the well being of its pupils; the use of closed circuit television cameras and a good number of staff in and around the school outside of lessons contributes substantially to the pupils' care.
48. The school's arrangements for monitoring and promoting good attendance are satisfactory overall. The school is aware of the need to improve upon its promotion and monitoring of its pupils' attendance. To this end it has recently introduced an electronic registration system, which enables it to track individual pupils much more thoroughly. This, together with a close working partnership with the newly appointed Education Welfare Officer, is a good foundation for improving and sustaining improved attendance.
49. Procedures for managing behaviour are very good. The school has a very clear vision regarding the development of the whole pupil and its approach is entirely inclusive. To this end it has recently updated its behaviour policy, which sets out the school's rules and rewards based on its philosophy of inclusion. It is an excellent policy and its worth is borne out by the very good behaviour of the majority of the pupils. There is a clear system which gives step by step guidance to all staff members and ensures that pupils are left in no doubt as to the consequences of their actions. The school shows in many ways its thoughtfulness in its desire to support its pupils to ensure they make the most of their time at the school. For example the school has an on-site school counsellor to offer confidential guidance to any pupil who requests support. Another very good feature is the inclusion unit, which works closely with those pupils experiencing academic or personal difficulties. The school, however, does not only reach out to its struggling pupils but also focuses on those who try hard but do not always gain recognition. For example, Year 8 pupils have the opportunity to receive an ACE award for good effort and contribution to the life of the school. The school is keen to ensure that the rewards the pupils receive are appropriate and has responded to the suggestions from its year councils and tutor groups. For example, Year 11 pupils receive CD vouchers, cinema tickets and paint-balling weekends in recognition of their efforts.
50. The school has good links with a range of outside agencies and this ensures that the needs outlined in Statements of Special Educational Need are provided for pupils with these statements.
51. The pastoral system in the school is very good; the school has given a high priority to the welfare of its pupils and it works hard to ensure this. Senior members of staff, together with the relevant outside agencies, meet regularly to review the school's provision. It is because of its proactive approach and its desire that communication between all layers of management are as effective as possible the school has recently introduced a computerised pupil log system which allows heads of year immediate access to all of a pupil's records. This is a very good device for monitoring pupils' academic and personal development, as it ensures that any issues such as attendance or problems within subjects can be followed up quickly as the log is updated daily. However, the role of the form tutor and the use of form time remain to be fully clarified. Although tutors offer good

personal support and guidance based on a very good rapport with their pupils and guided by relevant training, for example, in effective circle time and raising attainment through pastoral care, their contribution to the guidance and monitoring of the pupils' academic support is underdeveloped; in some cases, form time at the beginning of the day is not well used, with much of the time, in effect, wasted.

52. When the pupils enter the school, they are well settled and integrated though the school's good induction procedures which ensure that the youngest pupils feel secure and at ease in their new school. In conversation, the Year 7 pupils agreed this was the case. The pupils benefit from a very good personal social and health programme, which contributes very well to their personal development. The school also offers pupils many opportunities to contribute to the life of the school, which encourage maturity and responsibility. For example the system of year group councils, form captains, sports captains and school prefects as well as many opportunities to be involved in extra curricular activities.

Assessment

53. In September, the school introduced new procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress. Teachers have useful information about pupils' attainment on entry to the school, from National Curriculum levels and standardised test results as a result of good links with primary schools. Subjects formally assess pupils three times each year and keep clear records of individual pupils' levels of attainment. However, until this year, there were no common procedures for assessing pupils' progress. All teachers are now given minimum target levels and grades for each pupil in their subject, based on prior assessment. This is beginning to help all teachers to assess pupils' progress more rigorously and to identify pupils who are not achieving as well as they might. However, the school does not yet use information to monitor the attainment and progress of pupils from minority ethnic groups.
54. Monitoring of pupils' academic performance and personal development is good overall. Several subjects monitor and support pupils' progress well. For example, the English department uses information from assessment to support individual pupils who are finding the work difficult. In physical education, pupils are very aware of what they have to do to improve their performance, because teachers make sure they understand National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades. Similarly, in science, pupils know how well they are doing because they are encouraged to evaluate and record their own levels of attainment. However, not all subjects set sufficiently clear, short-term targets to help pupils to improve. In art and design and technology, for example, pupils are seldom given individual targets that are related to the work they are doing in those subjects. The school does not yet provide opportunities for pupils to discuss their academic progress in all subjects with their form or year tutor.
55. The school makes very good use of assessment to help plan the curriculum. For example, English, mathematics and science departments form appropriate teaching sets and groups related to pupils' levels of attainment. The English department has recently identified writing skills, especially among boys, as a particular area for development and has encouraged more use of word processors when appropriate to improve the presentation of their work. Teachers use their knowledge of pupils' strengths and weaknesses to guide them to appropriate courses in Years 10 and 11. For example, they suggest that pupils choose GCSE or GNVQ courses, partly on the basis of their prior attainment in different subjects. Pupils who will benefit from early entry to GCSE are also identified from teachers' assessments.
56. Procedures for assessing the needs of pupils on the special educational needs register are good. Pupils' needs are identified quickly and efficiently. They are usually known before they arrive in the school because of close links with primary schools. All teachers, support assistants, parents and pupils themselves contribute information about pupils' progress, so that annual reviews of statements are carried out very efficiently. Support staff ensure that useful targets are written for pupils in their individual education or behaviour plans. Subject teachers take account of these their planning. Pupils are aware of their targets and know what they need to do to make progress. Individual behaviour plans are reviewed at least twice each year but some individual education

plans (IEPs) are only reviewed annually. Overall, procedures for identifying and monitoring the progress of pupils on the special needs register need to be developed further.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

57. Overall parents have good and very positive views of the school. However, some parents voiced some concerns over a few areas of the school's work through the questionnaire and also through thoughtful and pertinent comments. These parents were mainly concerned about the amount of homework their children receive, the quality of information on their children's progress, and that the school not working closely enough with them. What pleased parents most was that their children enjoy coming to school, that they achieve well because of the good teaching and good leadership, that behaviour is good, the approachability of the school when problems occur, that the pupils are expected to work hard and act responsibly and the extra curricular activities on offer. The inspection team agrees with all of the parents' positive views but finds that the pupils do usually receive an appropriate amount of homework that supports their work and achievements. However the team agrees that parents are not as involved as they might be with the work of the school in respect of information and discussions about what is taught, and that they do not receive clear and helpful information in all subjects via their children's annual reports.
58. One of the main day-to-day links between the school and its parents is the pupils' homework diary and, although these are used appropriately to record homework, they are not used well to build a meaningful dialogue between the school and its parents. The parents of Year 7 pupils are welcomed to the school through an informal cheese and wine meeting early in the school year and the school believes this event sets the tenor of its relaxed approach to its partnership with its parents. It is keen to promote an open door policy, which enables parents to feel comfortable about approaching the school with their concerns, and this is justified by the high percentage of parents who corroborate this. The parents of all year groups have satisfactory opportunities to meet with their children's tutor and subject teachers. The school is aware that the large numbers involved at parent consultation meetings can cause dissatisfaction because of time restraints and so is prepared to offer parents the opportunity to make individual appointments to follow up any issues. Also the school, in line with its open approach, is introducing termly assessment cards for each pupil in order to keep parents better informed of their children's progress.
59. The involvement of parents with the work of the school is good. The school has six elected parent representatives on the governing body. The school involves parents at an early stage in any behavioural or attendance issues to ensure their support. The careers programme also involves parents well and they have the opportunity to share in their children's career guidance. Parents willingly give of their time and effort to supporting the school. For example, they have organised Christmas parties and carol services and autumn fairs in order to fund raise for school projects such as the school's ecological project to regenerate a woodland area. Parents' expertise is used in some areas of the curriculum, for example in the physical education department; however this is not well developed, although they do help with one off events such as trips abroad and at the outdoor pursuits centre in Wales.
60. The quality of general information provided for parents by the school is good, including a well presented and lively newsletter which includes contributions by all the subjects, a 'user friendly' prospectus and detailed annual report from the governing body. However, there is insufficient information for parents on what it is their children are learning at school and a lack of helpful guidance on how parents might support that learning. The school is aware that it needs to address this and, in the latest newsletter, some useful web sites and events related to the science and history curriculum are particularly useful.
61. There are also weaknesses about the quality of reports to parents, although, again, the school is developing new procedures for reporting pupils' attainment and progress to parents. At present, reports meet statutory requirements, but, in most subjects, they provide insufficient information about pupils' achievements. Apart from English, they give little detail about pupils' knowledge and understanding, and the concerns of some parents about this are justified.

62. Parents' contribution to their children's learning at school and at home is satisfactory. They are a supportive body of parents, the vast majority of whom have selected to send their children to this school. They turn out in large numbers to parents' consultation meetings and involve themselves willingly with school events. The school is yet to fully capitalise on their commitment.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

63. The leadership and management of the school are very good. The school is a very large and complex organisation which has faced, and still is facing, some very particular pressures and challenges. Its success in dealing with them and moving so successfully forward at the same time indicate the very high quality of leadership and management of the school. The headteacher is an outstanding leader, and his strengths are very well supported and complemented by other key staff who, between them, provide a very wide range of skills which they perform at a high level.
64. The magnitude of some of the pressures on the school on top of the ones faced by all large schools can be seen in the following list: numbers have grown by 40 per cent in the last five years; the school has outgrown its accommodation, much of which is very crowded, outdated or temporary; the number of new teachers appointed recently is very high; there is a very wide range of pupils academically and socially; the headteacher, some other senior staff and governors have been spending very great amounts of time and energy negotiating extremely complex arrangements for a major scheme to transform the school's accommodation; there are other major initiatives, such as the bid for Sports College status, that are crucially important in the strategic planning of the school. The bureaucratic demands have been very great, but the school has managed these and other matters very successfully whilst maintaining and enhancing the many strengths that have characterised the school for many years.
65. The leadership of the school has a very clear view of the educational direction of the school, and there is an equally clear shared commitment to that vision which is explicit in the aims of the school and in its motto of 'industry and integrity'. It is a school that cares for people, as seen, for example, in its achieving Investors in People and Investors in Careers status; pupils and teachers feel valued and supported, and its bid for training school status shows its commitment to the training of future teachers. Pupils have very good attitudes, and the school is a harmonious, friendly and fully inclusive place with very good relationships and concern for the individual. It has, therefore, responded well to the new pressures and maintained its strong ethos; whilst there is scope for further improvement in examination results, the school caters very well for its diverse range of pupils, with both the highest attainers and those with learning difficulties achieving very well. The school has wisely strengthened its management structures and systems to cope with its growth, and is now making very effective use of new technology to support its management. For example, the 'pastoral log' of any pupil can be accessed instantly by any senior teacher on their personal computer, and the recently introduced electronic registration system is a very powerful tool to monitor attendance, and has very considerable potential for use in monitoring pupils' academic progress. A splendid and innovative way of communicating internal notices, the 'thought for the day', and messages of congratulations and thanks, etc is the use of monitor screens throughout the school to display a rotating sequence of messages which are changed, and, sometimes, added to daily. This use of technology is a small but significant illustration of thoughtful and effective management systems that benefit all members of the school community.
66. Development planning follows a coherent pattern. The three-year development plan has seven, clear and manageable aims which are linked to the school's priorities and are fully costed. Within the three-year plan, there is a process of annual review which gives good opportunities for sensible adjustments and evaluation to take place. The linking of the school's development planning cycle with that of the local authority is very sensible; it gives more financial security to the planning process, and also allows for a natural link between the authority's priorities and those of the school.
67. There are many good middle managers, and an important factor in the overall high quality of leadership and management of the school is the strength of the management of subjects and of pastoral care. Nearly all subject leaders provide good, effective leadership, and are committed to

raising standards. There are many examples of very good leadership and management; for example, its quality in mathematics last year helped the improvements in the subject despite considerable staffing difficulties. The school is also well served by its pastoral leaders, with heads of year working effectively together under the leadership of a senior manager. The school's performance management systems are good and are developing well. However, they are still at an evolutionary stage with a number of strategies within the overall policy. This means, at present, that the quality of the monitoring and evaluation of teaching is variable. To raise standards further, there is a need for more developments in the rigorous evaluation of teaching and pupils' learning, particularly in the refinement and sharpening of the processes, whilst maintaining the very supportive and positive features of the school's performance management arrangements. Similarly, although the school has very good systems for collecting data about pupils' performance and there is good practice in some subjects, pupils' awareness of their strengths and weaknesses is not always certain, and there is scope for subject and pastoral managers to lead other teachers in a more active role with pupils in these areas.

68. Since the last inspection the school has extended its provision for pupils with special educational needs, and the leadership and management of special educational needs are very good. The learning centre concentrates mainly on pupils' academic needs but an additional support centre has been established to help pupils with social, emotional and behaviour difficulties. This successful development is the result of a clear vision and effective management. The special needs coordinator and the inclusion coordinator work closely together to ensure that both centres follow the same procedures. All staff have clear responsibilities and this helps them to work effectively. Visiting teachers also have precise responsibilities to enable them to make the most efficient use of their time in school. However, support teachers and assistants spend much of their time teaching pupils individually. At times they could work more efficiently by teaching small groups in order to meet the needs of more pupils. The special needs coordinator has identified some appropriate priorities for development. Among these is the need to clarify criteria for evaluating the success of the school's provision for pupils with special educational needs. The learning and support centres have a good range of appropriate resources but pupils with dyslexia would benefit from more specific resources to help teachers to meet their needs.
69. The governors share the strategic vision for the school's future needs, and they provide a wealth of experience for the school's benefit. Some spend considerable amounts of time getting to know how the school is working, and some, notably the chairman of governors, have been very closely involved in negotiations for new buildings. Governors have a good knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses, and their committee structures ensure a proper scrutiny of the school's management. Apart from non-compliance about a daily act of collective worship for all pupils, they meet their statutory obligations, and, overall, they fulfil their responsibilities very well.

Staffing

70. There is a good match of teachers to the needs of the curriculum in the great majority of subjects. Pupils in most subjects, including modern foreign languages, where there are two foreign nationals teaching, and physical education where specialist coaches are employed, benefit from a team of teachers which has a good balance of youth and experience. Wise financial planning has enabled the appointment of a larger than expected number of younger teachers, allowing pupils to be taught in smaller classes. There are occasions, when classes containing a high proportion of pupils who have special educational needs, require additional classroom support. The systems the school has devised for the induction of new teachers and newly qualified teachers, as well as the professional development of established teachers, are outstanding. Newly appointed teachers attend the school for an induction day when they meet other teachers and their professional mentors. Newly qualified teachers are also attached to a "buddy" mentor, who normally teaches in an adjoining classroom. The success of the system can be measured by the easy way the 24 new teachers appointed this year have quickly settled into the school and are playing their part in raising standards. The school has an Action Research programme, and part-funds members of staff to pursue further degrees in subjects such as literacy in art, or short courses. This will benefit the pupils of the school because teachers are thinking very clearly about teaching methods and how pupils learn. Trainee teachers are fully integrated into the work of the school,

including the Christmas pantomime, and receive lectures each week into aspects of teaching and learning.

Accommodation

71. The quality and adequacy of the accommodation of the school vary enormously. Despite serious shortcomings in many areas, the accommodation is judged adequate overall because of the tremendous efforts of teachers and pupils to ensure that accommodation difficulties do not adversely affect standards in many areas. Nonetheless for many individual subjects areas, identified in other parts of the report, the accommodation, at present, is unsatisfactory because it prevents the full teaching of parts of the syllabus, and, therefore, lowers standards in some aspects of these subjects.
72. The library is superb; its design and facilities send a powerful message of the importance of the library to the school. Other areas, such as modern foreign languages, have very good accommodation which promotes high quality study and work. However, even in this curriculum area, one teacher teaches in a temporary classroom away from the other rooms. Indeed, the shortage of permanent classrooms means that few subjects have all their rooms together; as a result, teachers have to work particularly hard to maintain good quality communications with each other and to ensure the best uses of learning resources. Often, additional accommodation is in some of the 13 temporary classrooms around the site. Expansion in the teaching of ICT has put very great pressures on the school's specialist computer rooms, and, at present, they are inadequate to meet the needs of subjects across the curriculum. Accommodation in many subject areas, including practical areas such as science, art, and design and technology, is outdated and in need of major refurbishment. Teachers and pupils do their very best to overcome the difficulties by very good displays of work to create as attractive an environment as possible. The displays of two and three dimensional art work, for example, are excellent, transforming drab corridors and areas such as the outside of the main hall. In physical education, the best possible use is made of an unattractive sports hall, but, in addition, imaginative use is made of several off-site facilities to enhance opportunities for senior pupils in physical education. Another splendid facility is the school's own accommodation in North Wales, used for fieldwork and various outdoor pursuits activities. By hiring the centre to other users when not required by the school, it is entirely self-financing.
73. Because the school has outgrown its accommodation, there is very great pressure on space; corridors and circulation spaces, both indoor and outdoor, are very crowded. It is to the credit of the mature good sense of most pupils and the good supervision by teachers that serious problems do not arise. However, the very serious lack of adequate hard surface areas outside means that the school becomes dirty very quickly because of the amount of mud that inevitably is brought in on pupils' shoes. This, again, makes the job of maintaining a civilised and pleasant working atmosphere difficult. Nearly all these difficulties caused by the accommodation will be resolved when the very major programme of new buildings and refurbishment is completed. The school will then have accommodation appropriate for its needs and aspirations, and the potential of this transformation to enhance learning and standards attained is very considerable.

Learning resources

74. The learning resources, books, equipment and materials are satisfactory in most subjects. Although much improved from the time of the previous inspection, the main weakness is in the low number of computers in all subject areas and computer suites: overall there is only one machine for every 12 pupils compared to the national ratio of 1:7. The quality of computers is now very high, but increasing demands from timetabled ICT and GNVQ lessons, and the present relatively low numbers, mean that there is a significant shortfall between what is available at present and what is needed. This shortfall will adversely affect teaching and learning programmes until new buildings and equipment are available. The provision of sufficient textbooks across departments is uneven with English, history and modern foreign languages providing well for pupils. Those pupils studying geography do not have textbooks and most homework is based on photocopied sheets, which weakens the potential of the homework to extend learning. The science department is developing an impressive wildlife resource. This makes best use of the

natural habitat to provide a rich learning resource for pupils and the community. The learning and support centres have a good range of appropriate resources, but pupils with dyslexia would benefit from more specific resources to help teachers to meet their needs.

75. As well as being a very attractive room, the library is a well-stocked resource. It is welcoming, with very good displays of artwork and books; it is well used and an efficient resource for independent learning. Pupils make good use of the computer facilities. An analysis of pupils' use and borrowing of books is undertaken by the librarians with prizes awarded. New stock has been bought to extend the range of reading and research materials. There are still very few design and technology books, but, generally, gaps in stock, identified at the previous inspection have been addressed.

Efficiency

76. Financial planning is very good, and longer term financial planning is clearly related to the school's educational priorities. Because the bursar is a member of the senior management team, the close link that should exist between educational priorities, financial planning and day-to-day financial management is very successfully achieved. The quality of management information about the school's finances is very high, using modern information systems very effectively. As a result, senior managers and governors are able to monitor spending very effectively, and also successfully apply the principle of best value. Overall, there is good use of resources, including special funding and special grants. Funding for special educational needs is used appropriately. Decisions on spending under different budget headings are made after thorough reference to the school's needs and circumstances, so that, for example, planning for spending on teachers and the curriculum needs of the school takes into account the greater number of less experienced teachers in the school at present, and also the longer term staffing costs.
77. The school has a basic budget that is lower than other secondary schools in the local authority, but which, with additions from direct grants and other sources, is broadly average compared with similar schools nationally. As a result of very good financial management, its finances are secure, and, at present, teachers tend to teach slightly smaller classes for a slightly lower proportion of the school's working week than is found on average in similar types of school. However, at present, they and the pupils work in conditions that are often overcrowded and unsatisfactory. The new building and refurbishment project, for which the headteacher and others are working so energetically and imaginatively, is crucial for the school's future development. It is to the very great credit of all who work at the school that it is achieving so well despite present conditions. Pupils join the school with a very wide, but improving, range of attainments, which, for pupils at the senior end of the school, were a little above average overall. They also have a very wide range of social and economic circumstances, which, taken as a whole, are broadly average. They leave school with results that are above, and, in some cases, well above average. The vast majority of pupils are very well behaved, lively and pleasant; they leave the school, in the main, as mature and responsible young people. Relationships are very good as is personal development. Teaching is good, and the school is led by an outstanding headteacher who enjoys the confidence of nearly all his staff, pupils, governors and parents. The school is judged to give good value for money, and it has the capacity to improve its effectiveness still further.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

All the following issues are already being addressed by the school, but need to be fully resolved as part of strategies to take the school further forward from its already strong position. The numbers in brackets refer to the relevant paragraphs in the report.

1. See through to completion the very major project for new buildings and refurbishment, including significant additions to computing suites and facilities by:
 - a. ensuring that the headteacher and others closely involved have sufficient time to successfully manage all aspects of the project over the next 18 months;
 - b. identifying very clearly how access to, and use of, computing suites and facilities will be managed so that all subjects are able to use ICT effectively.

(See paragraphs 40, 64, 71, 72, 74, 77, 81, 87, 89, 98, 102, 108, 116, 117, 123, 127, 131, 139, 143, 144, 146, 147, 155, 162, 164, 168, 169 and 177.)

2. Improve communications with parents, especially in the areas of information about the curriculum and pupils' progress by:
 - a. engaging with parents in dialogue about the type of information and communication that would be most useful to them;
 - b. analysing what information is sent out at present to see if improvements could be made;
 - c. reviewing reports to parents and, by studying good practice in the school and elsewhere, determining how best the school communicates information about pupils' progress.

(See paragraphs 57, 58, 60, 61 and 62.)

3. Improve further the rigorous evaluation of teaching and pupils' learning by:
 - a. determining how the best practice already in the school can be more fully shared across the school;
 - b. developing the skills of evaluators so that the analysis of teaching and learning is of the highest quality for the benefit of all teachers and pupils;
 - c. encouraging further research and other professional development by teachers into teaching and learning styles.

(See paragraphs 8, 20-26, 53, 54, 56, 67, 88, 98, 123, 132 and 139.)

4. Continue to develop strategies to improve the attendance of some pupils by:
 - a. fully developing the potential of the new electronic registration systems to monitor attendance;
 - b. identifying at an early stage attendance problems of individual pupils and working with the education welfare officer to prevent the problems becoming serious;
 - c. developing further courses of study that are relevant and interesting to the minority of pupils whose attendance is a cause for concern.

(See paragraphs 19 and 48.)

In addition, governors should consider including other areas for review when drawing up the action plan. These are: improving standards in design and technology (see paragraphs 3, 10, and 121-124); the role of the form tutor and the use of morning registration time (see paragraphs 51, 54 and 67).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	168
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	80

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	9	46	70	26	10	0	0
Percentage	6	29	44	16	6	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1497	-
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	204	-

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	15	-
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	300	-

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	14

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	23
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	44

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	92.1
National comparative data	91.3

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.5
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 Year 9

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	145	172	317

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	90	106	110
	Girls	128	119	116
	Total	218	225	226
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	69 (73)	71 (63)	72 (62)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	39 (34)	49 (39)	38 (30)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	106	121	126
	Girls	137	131	136
	Total	243	252	262
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	77 (78)	80 (68)	83 (76)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	43 (43)	52 (44)	47 (47)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

Attainment at the end of Year 11

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	116	115	231

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	104	115
	Girls	73	111	113
	Total	126	215	228
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	55 (52)	93 (86)	99 (93)
	National	50 (49)	87 (87)	95 (94)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	43.9 (43.2)
	National	39.1 (38.9)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate	
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	16	
	National		100
			N/a

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	3
Black – African heritage	9
Black – other	8
Indian	9
Pakistani	6
Bangladeshi	5
Chinese	3
White	1454
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other	2	
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	60	1
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)	99.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	10.0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	247

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	22.7
Key Stage 4	21.7

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	22
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	35

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	2
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial information

Financial year	2000/1
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	£
Total income	3,742,612
Total expenditure	3,617,719
Expenditure per pupil	2,534
Balance brought forward from previous year	7,340
Balance carried forward to next year	132,233

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1497
Number of questionnaires returned	223

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	43	50	7	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	40	50	5	0	5
Behaviour in the school is good.	21	54	9	1	15
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24	53	17	5	2
The teaching is good.	26	59	3	0	12
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	43	24	6	5
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	47	43	5	2	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	49	46	3	0	2
The school works closely with parents.	20	41	25	6	8
The school is well led and managed.	39	49	2	0	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	38	51	7	0	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	49	38	7	1	5

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

Forty-two parents attended the parents' meeting and 43 parents made comments on the questionnaire or in separate letters, though a number were very brief. Most of the comments gave reasons for their responses. The balance of comments both at the meeting and in writing was very positive, and largely reflects the responses in the questionnaire. Concerns over homework, about information about what is taught, and about information about the progress pupils are making were, by far, the principal worries. Most parents who wrote about concerns were also very supportive of the school generally, but felt frustrated about a few things. Praise for the school covered a very wide range of points including extra-curricular activities, the caring nature of the school, and the quality of leadership and management.

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

ENGLISH

78. Overall, the quality of provision in English is **good**.

Strengths

- Very strong leadership of the department encourages high standards.
- Teaching is good; there is some very good and outstanding teaching.
- Relationships between pupils and teachers are very good.
- Very good assessment supports pupils' learning and encourages them to achieve well.

Areas for improvement

- Accommodation for drama is unsatisfactory at present.
- Weaker classroom management in less successful lessons reduces pupils' achievements.
- Limited access to computers restricts progress in some aspects of the subject.

79. Results in the 2001 National Curriculum tests for pupils at the end of Year 9 are above the national average and well above the national average for schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds. English results are better than those are in many other subjects. The results are in line with the national trend and are consistent over time.

80. In the GCSE examinations in 2001, English results are above the national average and well above that for similar schools. Results in English literature are above the national average. Results in tests and GCSE represent good achievement since they are higher would be expected from the pupils' attainments when they entered the school.

81. In the work seen during the inspection, standards by the end of Year 9 are above average. This represents good achievement and improving standards, because, when the pupils joined the school, their overall standards were slightly above average. Reading, in particular, has improved, showing particularly good achievement. Most pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of literacy skills. Their oral skills are good in classroom discussion and they are keen and confident speakers in formal situations. Formal debating skills seen in a Year 9 lesson show a high calibre of communication and use of persuasive language from confident, well prepared pupils. Writing standards are above average; pupils have grasped key skills in spelling, punctuation and grammar and their work is generally very well presented. Writing is also creative and poetic; for example, one Year 7 pupil's poem included the following: '...West pier at sunset/starlings swoop and swarm in an aerial ballet'. The work of a minority of pupils, mainly boys, is less well presented. Recent initiatives to improve boys' standards include a sensitive choice of texts and high expectations. These are beginning to have a positive impact. The standards of all pupils are benefiting from a wide choice in the variety of writing assignments and increasing use of ICT to aid the presentation of work. However, the use of ICT is hampered at present by irregular access to the computer suite, although plans are underway to provide a computer room for English departmental use.

82. Standards in English by the end of Year 11 are above average, with continuing good achievement. The standard of work in English literature is also above average. Pupils write with understanding and appreciation of Shakespearean texts and pre-20th century poetry. They read a wide variety of texts and successfully make complex inferences. A key feature in the pupils' work is their ability to place texts in an historical context and then compare it with modern society. They can evaluate character and theme at a sophisticated level and produce detailed writing assignments. Overall, presentation of work is careful and consistent. Pupils can analyse media texts and research references. They use standard and non-standard English appropriately and are respectful listeners. A minority of pupils relies too heavily on the teacher and their work is brief, lacking in detailed understanding and insight.

83. Pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language make good progress. They receive good support from their class teachers who use educational plans

provided by the special educational needs department to plan lessons and devise strategies for success.

84. The quality of teaching and learning is good, and there are examples of very good and outstanding teaching and learning. In a small minority of lessons, pupils learn less than they should because the pace is too slow and successful classroom management strategies are lacking. In a small minority of otherwise satisfactory lessons, work for different groups of pupils is not matched closely enough to their needs, so some can flounder and take up unnecessary amounts of the teacher's time asking questions. In the very good and excellent lessons, there is a brisk pace; pupils are clearly motivated and a large amount of work is completed. Pupils enjoy exchanging ideas with each other and their teacher in an atmosphere of achievement and respect. Pupils respond well to their teachers' care for their achievement and this helps develop the very good relationships evident in the department. In a Year 11 lesson on poetry, the pupils thoroughly appreciated analysing homelessness and deepening their understanding of the poem. They consciously shaped language for a purpose and presented their findings in a deeply felt and expressive manner, because the teacher sensitively drew out their ideas and encouraged their thinking. In a Year 7 lesson, pupils worked furiously to draft and polish their work and spoke meaningfully about their tasks in pairs. They produced a large amount of work and enjoyed it immensely; the teacher's enthusiasm infected the pupils, whose sheer joy of the lesson encouraged and developed their love of the subject. In a small minority of lessons pupils are not sufficiently involved by the teacher, so they lose interest and less work is produced.
85. Homework clubs are popular and allow the pupils to solve problems and complete work in a supportive environment. Pupils' work is marked regularly and the department makes very good use of assessment information. Marking is consistent and constructive, and encourages pupils to improve their work.
86. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of department has a clear educational vision that inspires both teachers and pupils. Teachers share the preparation of schemes of work and departmental responsibilities; as a result, they are regularly discussing what is best for the pupils. They observe each other's lessons and this sharing of good practice is improving teaching styles, classroom management and pupils' learning. Procedures for assessment are clear and used by the head of department to set individual pupils' targets. Pupils' work is cross-checked for progress, standards and capability and this ensures that they are all pushed to reach their potential.
87. Progress since the last inspection has been good. Pupils' achievements have been maintained, and literacy teaching has been used effectively to target further improvements in English language. There is only limited access to the computer suites, so pupils' opportunities to improve their skills of drafting and re-drafting work are restricted at present. To raise standards further in drama, there is a need for more and better accommodation; this is recognised, and plans are being made by the school to provide a specialised drama room. The English departmental action plan's main priority is to target pupils working around grade D to help their improvement to higher grades at the end of Year 11, so continuing the success of the earlier success of the department in improving the standards of high and low attainers. By giving challenging opportunities to extend pupils' skills and thinking, homework is used effectively to support pupils' learning. Standards are rising, and, with the shared commitment to sharing good practice and attention to identified areas for improvement, the department has the capacity to succeed even further.

Drama

88. The provision of drama in Years 10 to 11 adds depth and breadth to the curriculum. Results were broadly in line with the national average at GCSE this Year, and pupils achieved well and gained results that were better than those in most other subjects that they studied. Standards in the work observed during the inspection were at the levels expected nationally and pupils continue to achieve well.
89. The quality of teaching is good, resulting in good learning. Teachers are committed to the subject and contribute to the wider education it gives the pupils. In particular, the drama teachers successfully put emphasis on encouraging decision making skills, and providing opportunities for

pupils to think for themselves. At the same time, the teachers' requirements for pupils to develop their own portfolios of work, visit theatres and to empathise with others help to develop their independence. Pupils learn well because lessons are well prepared and maintain a good pace. Consequently, all pupils gain the maximum insight into the subject as well as gaining knowledge of a wide range of sophisticated drama skills. Emphasis on varied activities, personal development and collaborative work enhances the enjoyment and motivation of the pupils. In a Year 10 lesson, dramatic presentations were professional, carefully planned and executed and skilful thanks to the high expectations of the teacher and carefully targeted lesson planning. A wide range of extra curricular activities contributes to the positive ethos of the school. In the prestigious annual production, staff and a large number of pupils work with many departments, which encourages collaboration in different disciplines and develops the very good relationships. Accommodation is unsatisfactory as pupils are taught in the canteen for the majority of their lessons. This does not allow for the specialised study of technical drama and is noisy and cold thus distracting the pupils. Because of inadequacies in accommodation for drama, standards are not as high as they could be. The school is planning to provide a different, more specialised drama room to address the learning needs of the pupils.

Literacy

90. Literacy skills across the curriculum are above average and supported by good provision. Dorothy Stringer School was chosen to be a pilot school for the national literacy strategy, and the good standards now reached reflect this involvement. A range of texts, in all subjects, encourages the use of technical and specialist vocabulary. The library supports all subjects for instance, by stocking specialised texts and multi-media materials. The English department has dictionaries and thesauruses available in each classroom; key words are displayed prominently in most classrooms to familiarise pupils with these words. Carefully censored Internet access allows pupils to research topics in detail. Pupils discuss their work enthusiastically and sensibly in most subjects and show respect to their peers and staff by listening attentively. More developed discursive and analytical speaking is not consistent, however, in subjects where literacy teaching is less emphasised. Writing at length is a feature in English, French and design and technology, and the teaching of basic literacy skills is taken seriously by most subjects and with the support of the English and special educational needs departments; as a result, pupils gradually make improvements to their spelling, reading and writing skills.

MATHEMATICS

91. Overall, the provision for mathematics is **good**.

Strengths

- The management of this large department is good, as standards have risen despite staffing difficulties.
- The use of assessment is good, a factor in the improved standards since the last inspection.
- Monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching are good, raising pupils' achievements since the last inspection.

Area for improvement

- Some higher attaining pupils in Year 7 underachieve because the work they are doing is too easy for them.

92. The proportion of pupils reaching the standard expected for their age in the Year 2001 national tests at the end of Year 9, and at the higher levels, was above the national average for all schools and well above the average for similar schools. In recent Years, performance has been constant with a rise in 2001. Boys and girls perform equally well. Performance matches that of English and science. Results were better than expected given pupils' average attainment on entry to the school, showing good achievement. Standards have improved since the last inspection.
93. In 2001, the proportion of pupils gaining GCSE A*-C was above the national average for all schools and above the average for similar schools. This represents good achievement and performance is comparable with other subjects in the school. Boys and girls perform equally well.

Standards have improved since the last inspection. Standards in using ICT in mathematics are satisfactory.

94. The standard of work seen in the inspection in Year 9 is above average, reflecting the results of 2001. Most pupils are achieving well in relation to their standards on entry to the school. There is some underachievement in Year 7 by some higher attaining pupils as the range of attainment in classes is wide. Teaching did not always provide challenging learning opportunities for these pupils in the lessons seen in the inspection. The result is that these pupils do not do as well as they should. Scrutiny of pupils' work showed that all Year 7 pupils get good challenges in their investigation work, one attainment target of the four in the teaching of mathematics. The intellectual powers of the higher attaining pupils in Year 9 are developing well as a result of the good challenges in the teaching. Their solutions of linear equations and inequalities are secure. Average attaining pupils are learning how to write two inequalities in one line. Formulae for the area and circumference of a circle are not known by heart by all pupils. Low attaining pupils use the formula for the area of a rectangle appropriately in solving simple problems. The use of other formulae, such as distance equals speed times time is not yet secure.
95. Throughout the school, arrangements for teaching the lower attaining pupils and those with special educational need provide well for their learning. The smaller groups and the learning support assistants for particular pupils are reasons why pupils achieve well. Support for those pupils who need extra support in learning English is also good. Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds and the gifted and talented also achieve well.
96. The standard of work seen in the inspection in Year 11 is above average. Most pupils achieve well in relation to their standard on entry to the school. The teaching arrangements focus appropriately on the needs of all pupils; the proposed levels of entry to GCSE correspond well to these arrangements as a result of the good use of assessment data. High attaining pupils work well in their revision for their practice GCSE, as their attitudes are very good. Revision work clearly showed pupils' areas of weakness in algebra due to the difficult staffing situation for them last Year. Course work is of a high standard, reflecting good use of computers through spreadsheets, word processing and graph work. Average attaining pupils find the comprehension of problems difficult as they lack the general knowledge, about properties of triangles for example, to make deductions. Lower attaining pupils in Year 10 can estimate answers to questions such as 93.84 divided by 10.4 . They can correct numbers to one or two decimal places and write a formula for a simple linear sequence of numbers.
97. The standard of teaching and learning is good overall. Three fifths of the teaching is good or better and nearly one third of the teaching is very good or better. There is a minority of unsatisfactory teaching. Mental work is a feature at the start of many lessons showing the benefits of recent innovations from the national numeracy strategy. This was seen at its best in an excellent lesson on the properties of circles when pupils took turns to define a shape in words for others to draw, an emphasis on the correct use of vocabulary. The subsequent whole class discussion on problem solving showed very good subject knowledge in the teaching, which enabled pupils to contribute effectively and so learn to solve similar problems. Overall teachers exhibit a good knowledge of their subject in lessons through the short, sharp quality of the questions in the teaching and this promotes good levels of understanding. The teaching of basic skills is good as it encourages pupils to explain their working. The planning of lessons is good and at times produces very good teaching in the form of a classic lesson, with learning flowing from the planning and the enthusiasm in the teaching. The result is very good learning, as in a Year 10 lesson on the teaching of Pythagoras' Theorem. When the management of pupils is unsatisfactory the teaching is unsatisfactory. At times the management of pupils is very good, as of a group of older, low attaining pupils. This ensured hard work and good progress in the lesson. Good visual learning opportunities in geometry and graph work arise from the use of computers in the teaching. The use of homework is good as it usually encourages pupils to take their learning forward. Marking is generally good and sometimes very good in support of pupils' learning through helpful suggestions to pupils in writing. Pupils' behaviour and their relationships with each other and with the teachers are very good and contribute significantly to their learning.

98. Leadership and management are good, responsible for the good improvement since the last inspection despite recent staffing difficulties. Teachers work hard and well as a team with new staff settling in quickly as a result. The curriculum satisfies the demands of the National Curriculum. Recent developments elsewhere in the school have reduced the department's access to computers until new building is complete; as a result, achievement in using computers as part of mathematics is satisfactory rather than good. Monitoring of the subject's performance has improved since the last inspection and is now good. It will need to be more rigorous if standards are to improve further; sharing good practice, for example, is one key way to raising overall standards of teaching.

Numeracy

99. Standards are above average overall, an improvement since the last inspection. However, although standards are above average in mathematics and science, they are average in some other subjects, such as art and geography. Use of number is good in most subjects and pupils use calculators appropriately and accurately. The use of graphs in science is very good as they are used well to record conclusions.
100. Overall strategies for teaching numeracy are good although there is no overall policy. The mathematics department is well into its development of the national numeracy strategy. Its teachers have been on training courses and the outcomes in many mathematics lessons are good as far as the teaching of basic skills is concerned. Whole school initiatives are planned. Opportunities for spatial development occur in the teaching of single-point and twin-point perspective in art. There are many opportunities in physical education where the use of numeracy in the teaching is good, comparing heart rates for example. Opportunities are missed in some subjects such as music, which has no policy on the subject. Other subjects such as science provide many such opportunities.

SCIENCE

101. The quality of provision in science is **good**.

Strengths

- Teachers are committed to including all pupils, with real strengths in encouraging pupils to believe in themselves. As a consequence, relationships between teachers and their pupils are very good.
- Pupils achieve good standards in knowledge and understanding because teachers communicate their love of the subject successfully.
- Pupils perform well in practical investigations as a result of realistic expectations for them to engage in first hand scientific enquiry.
- Good leadership and management mean there is a cohesive team of staff who ably reflect the values of the school.

Areas for improvement

- Pupils in Key Stage 4 do not have sufficient personal guidance to help them understand how to improve their chances of better examination success.
- Pupils do not make sufficient use of ICT for analysing and interpreting experimental data because resources are very limited.
- Restrictions of the accommodation currently limit the quality of practical experiences for pupils.

102. Standards in work seen by the end of Year 9 are above average, reflecting the test results for the current Year and improving on earlier performance. Results against similar schools are well above average, showing good achievement. Standards in work seen by the end of Year 11 are above average with good achievement and are better than the overall published examination results indicate because some additional and more appropriate courses are now being taught. Although GCSE results are average overall for all science courses, examination results for those pupils taking all three sciences are above average. Girls' results are above those of boys overall. Boys are above girls in the separate sciences, but below in the combined sciences. A new course in GNVQ science more closely meets the needs of some pupils in the current Years 10 and 11.

Results of the first modules are encouraging, with a good proportion obtaining distinction and merit awards. Standards of literacy and numeracy are above average. Standards in ICT are below average because pupils do not have sufficient access to good quality resources.

103. Pupils reach above average standards in lessons. By the end of Year 9, they have a good grasp of concepts, because teachers give pupils good practical experiences placing a strong emphasis on the use of scientific language. Pupils in the lowest set in Year 9 developed a good grasp of how muscles work because the teacher prepared a good range of practical exercises for them to link their own experience to explanations about movement. Books of the most able pupils show a very good understanding of subjects such as pollution. By the end of Year 11, pupils are very knowledgeable. Chemists use knowledge about particles to give very good explanations of chemical reactions and those taking foundation double award have a good grasp of how to calculate costs of using electrical appliances such as a hairdryer, understanding the implications of energy loss. Pupils have good standards of written work, presenting good reasoned arguments to explain experimental findings. Practical procedures are evaluated extensively, illustrating capable analysis.
104. Achievement is good in Years 7 to 9 and is continuing to improve. Year 7 pupils really enjoy finding out whether thinner or thicker leaves lose water more quickly, gaining good skills in weighing them accurately and gaining a very good understanding of variation in plants. Year 8 pupils make good observations from burning magnesium and copper in air. In learning to apply their knowledge of chemical symbols, they improve their understanding of chemical equations, because teachers have high expectations.
105. Achievement is good in Years 10 and 11 and is improving because the subject has made good use of assessment information to establish new programmes that match pupils' needs. Year 10 pupils following the GNVQ course become significantly more confident about electrical calculations by improving practical abilities in measuring the current through various circuits. They make very good progress because teachers work closely with them, correcting misunderstandings with individuals and small groups.
106. The most able pupils show considerable insights into scientific ideas. They are curious and imaginative, arguing their case very well during class and group discussions. In physics, Year 10 pupils reveal a very good understanding of how shape influences stability as they work productively together. They begin to show creativity and imagination because the teacher gives them an excellent opportunity for applying their knowledge to a design task. Most pupils taking double award science achieve well, although the department has recognised the need for more rigorous monitoring of progress during the course in order to identify problems for individuals early enough for them to take corrective action. Pupils in lower sets are making very good gains in literacy and numeracy because teachers place good emphasis on these skills. Pupils with special educational needs are very well catered for and feel fully included because the preparation of work for them is of a high standard, as seen in a lesson where they made very good observations about the characteristics of acids and alkalis. Boys and girls achieve equally well in lessons because teachers are sensitive to their needs.
107. Teaching and learning are good because teachers encourage pupils to believe in themselves. They share their love of the subject through very good communication of scientific ideas. Pupils develop good powers of concentration because expectations for their involvement are high. Practical skills are good, but they all would benefit from more opportunity for exercising higher order skills such as decision-making and research. Teachers work very hard; this is evident from marking and a wide range of pupils' work on display. In matching work well to pupils' needs, they enable most to reach expected standards or better in lessons. In varying activities, they help pupils sustain interest and concentration for good periods of time. Pupils have clear guidance about test and examination criteria, but do not always understand how best to improve their work to raise examination success. Teachers are aware of this and want to introduce more detailed guidance for improving course work and enabling pupils to reach shorter-term goals. Teachers monitor the progress of pupils as they work in groups and this results in marked improvement of skills and knowledge. They review key aspects of pupils' learning at the end of the lessons, but

sometimes lose its impact because they have not left sufficient time for pupils to speak about their successes and their difficulties.

108. Leadership and management are good. A cohesive team reflects the aims of the school in its work to raise standards and do the very best for pupils of all abilities. Highly committed teachers work hard to engage pupils of all abilities in challenging tasks, even though accommodation currently remains unsatisfactory. The department needs to plan for effective use of ICT in both key stages, as new accommodation becomes available. The quality of work provided by technicians is good, even though they work in difficult circumstances until the planned new laboratories are complete.

ART AND DESIGN

109. Overall, the quality of provision in art and design is **good**.

Strengths

- Standards are above average, and rising.
- Teaching and learning are good, leading to good progress and achievement.
- Gifted and talented pupils make very good progress in Years 10 and 11.
- The management of the department is good, encouraging high standards.
- High quality displays around the school celebrate art and have a very positive impact on the school environment.

Areas for improvement

- Provision for ICT and schemes of work for delivering ICT within the art curriculum are unsatisfactory.
- Systems for monitoring teaching and learning to remedy weaknesses in teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 need strengthening.
- The quality of assessment at the end of Year 9 needs improving to give pupils more accurate information about their standards.

110. Teacher assessments show that standards are above average by the end of Year 9 in 2001. These assessments are generous, especially for the boys. GCSE results in 2001 were well above average and reflect a steady improvement since the last inspection. Girls perform better than boys due to their better response to the opportunities in art, listening more carefully and having greater pride in their efforts.
111. The work seen during inspection week indicates that standards at all levels are above average and rising. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 use a wider range of processes and materials than is normal, most using sketchbooks to investigate and plan future work. Some sketchbooks however resemble homework books. They skilfully use their knowledge of European and multi-cultural art to influence their own work. The basic skills of looking and recording are generally good but there are occasions when weak drawing limits the quality of the work.
112. The standard of work in Years 10 and 11 is above average. Sketchbooks continue to be well used for research into design and composition but there is little evidence of a personal response to Brighton and its surrounds. Girls make much better use of their sketchbooks than boys. Pupils work extensively from observation but their drawing tends to be general rather than to investigate a particular feature such as space, or light, or texture. Invention is central to the work, which ranges from a response to "The Simpsons" cartoon series, compositions based on food wrappers in the style of Pop Art, to poignant reminders of the World Trade Center buildings in New York City.
113. Achievement in art is good. Pupils arrive in Year 7 having had a variety of prior experiences of art in their primary schools but by the end of Year 9, their work is above average. This good achievement continues up to Year 11 when pupils' work is above average. Those pupils who have special educational needs make good progress. Teachers are aware of their needs and plan the work so that these needs are met. Those who are gifted and talented do particularly well in Years 10 and 11, responding well to the opportunities provided by the broad curriculum. Almost half of

the pupils were awarded A* and A GCSE grades in 2000 and 2001, well above the national average.

114. Teaching and learning in art are good. Teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 is good overall but ranges from unsatisfactory to very good. Teaching in Years 10 and 11 is good and occasionally very good. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subject are very good and lessons usually start with clear, engaging explanations of planned activities. Much of the department's success is the result of very good pupil/teacher relationships, and the pupils' recognition of their teachers' genuine enjoyment of their subject. However, the quality of assessment at the end of Year 9 needs improving to give pupils a better idea of their standards.
115. In a very good Year 7 lesson, pupils were challenged and extended when making compositions from mono-prints of self-portraits. The teacher allowed the pupils to use their initiative, resulting in early but clear signs of independent learning. Year 11 pupils, working on a wide variety of individual projects, were making very good progress and their creative efforts increased as their teacher assessed their work, while skilfully prompting and encouraging them. They were proud of their work and pleased to explain it. Pupils negotiate the quantity and quality of their homework, which is another factor that promotes good progress and learning, as homework is appropriate to the needs of individual pupils. In the only unsatisfactory lesson seen, Year 9 pupils made very slow progress when pasting pictures cut from a magazine into their sketchbooks as a comment on The Material World. There was very little learning or creative challenge in the activity.
116. The overall curriculum in art is unsatisfactory due to the absence of opportunities to generate or manipulate imagery with ICT, a situation likely to be improved with the planned refurbishment of the department. Otherwise the curriculum is broad, with a wide range of two and three-dimensional processes. Critical studies are central to the department's activities and pupils develop a personal view of a range of European and multi-cultural art and artists. Assessment in art is satisfactory although marking sometimes fails to point out how pupils might improve. There is a need to provide pupils with short-term targets as well as long-term GCSE targets.
117. The leadership and management of art are good; teachers and pupils are pleased to follow the strong leadership. Planning is very strong but systems for monitoring teaching and learning lack rigour and schemes of work require further details for teaching ICT. The mix of youth and experience and the range of interests of the teachers are good. The accommodation for teaching art is unsatisfactory, the rooms being too small for larger groups. Much of the furniture is old and bears the scars of previous activities. Seven lessons are taught in a woodwork workshop. The display of work in the department and the public areas of the school is high quality, stimulating and inspirational, adding significantly to the overall environment of the school and giving many opportunities to celebrate pupils' achievements. The resources for learning, in spite of the good range of materials for two and three-dimensional processes, are unsatisfactory due to the lack of ICT.
118. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. Standards have risen to above average and progress is now good. Teaching and learning have improved. Gifted and talented pupils now make very good progress in Years 10 and 11. Pupils have improved their punctuality to lessons. The management of the department is now good.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

119. The overall quality of provision is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Pupils achieve well in lessons where teaching is good.
- A positive ethos for learning is always sought by teachers and almost always generated with all pupils expected to work hard and achieve the expected objectives in each lesson.
- Good relationships between teachers and pupils' ensure that a very pleasant atmosphere is generated and that learning takes place in a very caring environment.

Areas for improvement

- Although achievement is satisfactory, standards at the end of Year 11 are below average.
- Pupils are not always set tasks that give sufficient scope for them to develop their design, research, making and recording skills in an intellectually and creatively challenging way.
- The poor quality of some of the accommodation and the limited ICT resources for the subject has an adverse affect on learning and the standards achieved, with pupils' use of ICT in coursework and in design and manufacture much underdeveloped.

120. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 shows that the proportion of pupils achieving at level 5 and above is similar to the national average, but this is not supported by inspection evidence. The proportion of A*-C grades varies between the contributory specialisms, but GCSE results overall were well below the national average in 2001 and show a downward trend in attainment over the past two years. Girls attain better than boys in the subject, but they do not achieve as well as girls nationally. Boys attain significantly below boys nationally. Pupils attain below their potential in the subject when compared to how well they achieve in their other subjects.
121. At the end of Year 9, standards of work seen vary across the different material areas, but, overall, are below the national average. This represents satisfactory achievement overall given these pupils' below average attainment levels on entry into Year 7. Pupils work safely in a wide range of materials, and develop satisfactory skills with a range of tools and processes. For example, in the tie project in textiles and in the 'edible casings' project in food technology, pupils are given sufficient opportunities to design and make products. As a result, most pupils are able to understand a design brief, can carry out effective research and produce design outcomes which they enjoyed making; at the end of the process, they show satisfactory solutions to the original design brief. Graphical skills are generally weak with good examples of work not readily transferred to other units. In Year 9 resistant materials, pupils' designing is sometimes superficial when expectations are low. Pupils are starting to understand the requirements of the design process but much of the work done is skills based and expectations of the design element vary across the subject. In general, pupils' making skills are better than their designing, and a high proportion of evaluations are underdeveloped. In pupils' coursework, it is evident that higher attaining pupils convey their design ideas satisfactorily with average graphical communication skills. Lower attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, have very much weaker skills of presentation with inconsistencies in the way pupils approach and carry out their design and make tasks across all the design areas.
122. In work seen by end of Year 11 standards are below average overall, but reflect satisfactory achievement given that pupils' attainment is below average at the start of their GCSE courses. In food technology and graphics, most pupils are achieving well, and produce design folios that show satisfactory research and development of design ideas with often good graphical communication skills. However, in other design areas, whilst the presentation and graphicacy skills of the higher and average attaining pupils are satisfactory and occasionally good, too many lower attaining pupils show a weak understanding of design processes and present work showing little concept of spatial awareness and the expected conventions of design drawing. Too many pupils cannot use the correct technical terminology when describing their designs and in outlining the processes involved. The use of the computer by pupils to present work is very much underdeveloped as is their knowledge and understanding of the use of the computer to design and manufacture a simple product. Gifted and talented pupils are not yet clearly identified, and value added for lower attaining pupils is better than for higher attaining pupils and better for girls than boys in general. The school has modified the curriculum structure in Year 9 to enable pupils to gain greater experience in the material area of their choice. This strategy has the potential to lead to improved standards the end of Year 11 because pupils will have more time to develop their design and make skills.
123. Teaching and the learning are satisfactory in most lessons. In the minority of lessons where it is unsatisfactory, it is because the tasks set are insufficiently challenging in an intellectual and creative sense, and the expectations of outcomes are too low. In all lessons the teaching methods and styles used are successful in keeping pupils on task and working productively in a pleasant working atmosphere. Teachers produce lesson worksheets that provide pupils with guidelines for their tasks but the worksheets are not always sufficiently modified to meet the

needs of pupils of all levels of attainment. The development of pupils' literacy skills, particularly the technical language of the subject, is not universally implemented across all design areas. Marking is not always sufficiently focused on the design element of the work and does not give pupils sufficient and clear direction about how they can improve their work. In Years 7 to 9, the set tasks, assessment procedures and practice do not always inform pupils what level of the National Curriculum they are working towards. Because of this, their learning does not concentrate on the things they need to do to improve, hindering their progress. In most design areas, pupils' are encouraged to use computers to complete coursework but such work is very much restricted by a lack of ICT resources in the area. Homework is set, but learning is reduced because homework is not always sufficiently challenging. A positive ethos for learning is always sought by teachers and almost always generated with all pupils expected to work hard and achieve the expected objectives in each lesson. Good relationships between teachers and pupils ensure that a very pleasant atmosphere is generated and that learning takes place in a very caring environment. The technicians provide invaluable contributions to the pupils' learning by helping them whenever possible with their tasks.

124. The leadership in the subject is satisfactory, but, in some areas of management, the head of department is not getting the support she requires in the drive to raise standards. Overall, therefore, weaknesses mean that progress since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory, with a drop in standards in some areas. There is a lack of progression in the work; pupils' designing is sometimes superficial and expectations are low with an over-emphasis on focused tasks and the development of hand skills.

GEOGRAPHY

125. The quality of provision is **good**.

Strengths

- Standards are above average in work seen by Year 11 and show evidence of value added to prior attainment.
- Most pupils are able to make good use of maps, diagrams and other geographical skills.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to lessons and, as a result, are interested in the subject.
- Teaching is good overall and most teaching methods are varied and appropriate.
- The head of subject provides dynamic and energetic leadership.
- Display work is a very strong feature of the department.

Areas for Improvement

- The assessment system in Years 7 to 9 requires development so that levels of progression are clearly understood by the pupils.
- There is insufficient specialist accommodation.
- Lower attaining pupils would benefit from additional support in lessons.
- Successful learning and teaching strategies need to be shared more widely within the department.

126. The teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2001 showed results slightly above national average. This represents achievement that was satisfactory in relation to pupils' attainment on entry. GCSE results in 2001 were slightly below the national average. Staffing changes during the course may have accounted for the underachievement of many pupils, particularly boys, who gained borderline D grades. Results in previous years have been consistently better with above average results at grades A*-C grades in 2000.
127. In work seen during the inspection, standards by the end of Year 9 are similar to the standards seen in the 2001 teacher assessments: overall, it is broadly average, with a tendency towards above average; achievement is satisfactory with sound improvement from work in Year 7. There is a wide range of attainment in each year group with the majority of pupils working between levels 3 and 7; many, but not all, are achieving well. Pupils have experience of developing skills in handling data, graphs, maps, statistics and photographs. Pupils in Year 7 are able to draw sketch maps of their journey to school from the Brighton Street Map and understand scale and direction. Year 8 pupils consolidate their knowledge on Brazil and build up a concept diagram based on a

brainstorming exercise and the textbook. Higher attainers in Year 9 pupils understand the concept of economic development and most pupils are able to use statistical data to measure stages of growth. Lower attainers, including those with special educational needs, have more difficulty with extended writing and completion of tasks. Teachers are emphasising literacy skills and reading with very good use of key words and writing frames, and this results in above average literacy levels for most pupils, though it is higher with girls than boys. However, there is insufficient support in lessons for pupils with individual education plans so some of these pupils are achieving less well. Most pupils' numeracy skills are adequate to cope with statistics, graphs and map work concepts that are used in geography. Skills in ICT are not fully developed as the department only has access to the computers during the summer term.

128. In work observed in Year 10 and 11, standards are above average and achievement is good in relation to prior attainment. Most pupils from the wide range of abilities are achieving the realistic targets set for them in this subject, and the standards being reached are above last year's examination results. Year 10 pupils are beginning to appreciate the complexities of demography and the effects of birth and death rates on the stages of economic development. Many pupils are now achieving at the highest level and Year 11 coursework on the River Afon Ogwen and the urban geography of Brighton demonstrates a sophisticated range of analytical skills and good use of computers for word processing and data logging. Year 11 pupils were well supported in a revision lesson to apply their knowledge of coastal deposition to an examination question and reached high standards.
129. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. In all years, the majority of pupils work hard and want to do well. Pupils have positive attitudes towards teachers and lessons and this enhances concentration and interest. However, there were occasions in Years 8 and 9 when the behaviour was unsatisfactory due to inappropriate management and teaching strategies and this had an adverse effect on the learning and progress of the pupils.
130. Teaching and learning are good overall; it is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, but very good in Years 10 and 11. Teaching is generally better in Years 10 and 11 because there is an effective team of specialist teachers. Teaching in Years 7 to 9 is sometimes unsatisfactory due to less effective management and teaching strategies used by some teachers. As a result, the learning opportunities of pupils in Years 7 to 9, in particular, are too variable. On the whole, teachers have a secure knowledge of the subject and lessons are well planned with clear objectives and key words written on the board. Work is regularly marked often with detailed, supportive and developmental comments which help pupils' learning. The management of pupils is generally good with high expectations of good behaviour. An impressive range of successful teaching strategies include setting pupils achievable yet challenging tasks, following explanations by teachers, which lead to rapid learning by the pupils. Pupils make progress when they clearly understand the task and there is a balance between support by the teacher and independent work. In a number of lessons teachers talk for too long and the pupils do not learn as much as they should because they lose concentration. Pupils respond well to structured assignments and work well on individual and group tasks; as a result, their learning is good. Some teachers inspire and challenge the pupils and this leads to considerable interest and engagement in lessons, and, therefore, good learning and achievement. Teachers are able to involve the pupils in discussion and this leads to greater understanding and progress. Teachers are successful in developing literacy skills by using a range of written work for pupils and frequently using key words, structured work sheets and writing frames.
131. The recently appointed head of subject provides dynamic, energetic and very good leadership to a large department and this is already leading to some improvements in standards in the subject. She has revised the schemes of work and the topics studied are now both imaginative and appropriate; she is also beginning to tackle the problems of the variable quality of teaching in Years 7 to 9. The subject handbook provides clear direction and guidance within a genuinely collaborative approach. Lesson observations are now an established part of the performance management policy; this has led to greater rigour in the teaching which is having a positive impact on learning in most lessons, though some unsatisfactory teaching remains. Subject meetings are held on a regular basis and provide a forum for discussion on strategies for classroom improvement. Target minimum grades based on prior attainment are now used by the department

and GCSE pupils know what steps are required for improvement. The department is part of the pilot for the DfES project on teaching and learning at Key Stage 3 and this has led to the proposed development of new assessment systems. There is insufficient accommodation in the department and many teachers are using rooms that are distant from the departmental resources. The display work in the rooms and corridors is a very strong feature of the department and this has a positive effect on learning. Resources are well used although computers, interactive whiteboards and software would allow further development of teaching methods used by the teachers.

132. The subject has addressed most of the issues raised in the previous report, though inconsistencies in the quality of teaching remain. Several strategies to help literacy and writing skills have been put in place and are helping the progress of the lower attaining pupils. The curriculum has improved, as has support for teachers; with a greater emphasis on how teaching can improve pupils' learning, pupils' behaviour has improved because their needs are being addressed more successfully. However, there is still potential for further development within the subject, particularly as teachers wish to develop further the strategies for raising achievement at GCSE. There is a need for planning time to prepare materials for the new schemes of work in Years 7 to 9, and to develop a more coherent assessment system. Because some teaching is weaker, teachers need to share more fully successful teaching and learning styles so that the quality of all teaching can be raised to the very high standard that is taking place in many lessons. The progress of some classes will continue to be impeded until all teachers and pupils can use specialist facilities, which, at present, are not available in sufficient amounts. There is scope for further development of the fieldwork programme in Years 7 and 9 in order to improve pupils' analytical and observational skills. Pupils with special educational needs also require more support in the classroom in order to make progress in this subject. Overall, however, there has been good improvement since the last inspection and particularly under the new leadership. The subject is well placed to make further progress in the future.

HISTORY

133. Overall, the quality of provision in history is **good**.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is good achievement in all year groups as a result of good teaching and learning. • Examination results are above, and nearly well above, average. • Pupils respond well to lessons that are well planned and well delivered, and have very positive attitudes towards history. • Good effective and efficient leadership and management of the subject means there is a clear vision and good plans by the new head of department for the future development and growth of the subject. <p>Areas for improvement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schemes of work need to be completed as soon as possible for all years, including two new coursework units for the GCSE course. • Monitoring and assessment procedures need to be tightened in line with National Curriculum requirements. • The use of computers to aid work in history is underdeveloped. • Accommodation is unsatisfactory at present because there are insufficient rooms for all pupils to benefit from specialist facilities; those which do exist are drab and do not encourage learning. • There is less use of visits to local places of historical interest than is commonly found in similar schools.
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134. By the end of Year 9, pupils attain standards that are above the national average. Results in teacher assessments are above average, and a scrutiny of pupils' work indicates similar standards. In many classes observed during the inspection, pupils' attainment is often well above average. In these lessons, pupils handle historical facts to good effect and they increase their understanding of cause and effect. For example, Year 8 pupils, in their study of the relationships between colonists and native Americans in the seventeenth century, can show how cultural

differences concerning attitudes towards the ownership of land led to a deterioration in the relationships between the colonists and the indigenous population.

135. By the end of Year 11, the standards attained by pupils are above average. Results in 2001, in GCSE were also above the national levels. Although, in 2001, girls did much better than boys, the trend in recent years has been for boys' results to steadily rise, and in 2000, boys' results, were only three per cent below that of girls, a much smaller gap than is found nationally. A pleasing feature is that standards of pupils' work in several lessons seen during inspection, both of boys and girls, are often well above the standards achieved in similar schools nationally. In such lessons, pupils make balanced judgements, based on historical concepts, about the value of differing interpretations of historical events and developments. For example, Year 10 pupils, in their studies of Germany between the world wars, could examine different, and differing, sources in order to judge how successfully the Nazis used the Berlin Olympics in 1936 as a propaganda vehicle for their racist ideology. Pupils are gaining confidence when dealing with the complexities of analysis and evaluation.
136. Pupils' achievements in each year from Year 7 to Year 9 are good. Pupils enter the school with an average historical skills and knowledge. By the end of this stage of their learning, pupils have a good knowledge of the periods they are studying and they are effectively able to relate cause to effect. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 build on the progress made in the first three years. Their overall achievements by the end of Year 11 are also good. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and they are skilful at linking several facts together to make a comprehensive and cohesive historical picture. Higher attaining pupils, including the gifted and talented pupils, augment their knowledge with good analytical skills.
137. Teaching is good overall throughout Years 7 to 11 and pupils learn well as a result. No lesson observed during the inspection was less than satisfactory and some lessons were very good. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject. Lessons are well planned and well prepared and lead to good learning by pupils. A characteristic of history teaching is that the teachers' belief in the value of the subject is reflected in their enthusiasm for it. This has a strong impact on pupils' learning. Teachers are particularly good at establishing good relationships. In some lessons, teachers tend to be overly didactic and pupils are not sufficiently encouraged to become independent learners. In the best lessons, however, teachers are particularly adept at drawing out significant points from material, which is both challenging and exciting; as a result, teachers successfully exhort pupils to become more active participants in their own learning. For example, in a Year 7 lesson on the use of evidence in history, the teacher was able to ask what appeared, at first, to be a simple question of how many pupils would like to have been a king in medieval England and why. By getting the pupils to study, in depth, evidence concerning the lives, and particularly the deaths, of many of the monarchs of the period and to analyse it, as if engaged as detectives in a murder enquiry, she was able to get them to extrapolate a host of pertinent facts, and in many cases change their mind. The quality of her teaching led to pupils' good learning since pupils were stimulated by the challenge and applied their best intellectual and creative efforts to fulfil the tasks she set. Overall, the quality of teaching makes a significant impact on pupils' learning, attainment and progress.
138. The responses of pupils are good. With the exception of a small but significant group of pupils, mostly very low attainers, pupils generally show good application to their work. They respond diligently, settle quickly to task and sustain concentration. Their positive behaviour and responses, which are often a direct result of good teaching and good classroom management, are important factors in their increased learning.
139. There are several areas for development. Schemes of work do not yet reflect new curricular changes, particularly, but not exclusively at GCSE. The department does not yet have a comprehensive assessment policy based on sound principles and achievable outcomes. Monitoring of teaching and the setting of targets for pupils are in the very early stages of development. The number of specialist history teaching rooms is inadequate; this means that access to resources is confined and this restricts the range of teaching strategies and stimulating activities for pupils. Rooms are generally drab and do not help to create an atmosphere conducive to learning. There are no clear policies for the use of ICT, and as yet, there is insufficient access

to, use of and training in the use of ICT to support the subject. Because of this, the levels of research and independent learning in which the pupils can engage are restricted. There is insufficient use of visits to nearby places of historical interest, which would add immeasurably to the pupils' experience of history by allowing them access to primary sources relevant to their courses of study. Several of these areas for improvement were concerns of the last report, and overall improvement has only been just satisfactory.

140. However, in the few weeks in which he has been in post, the very recently appointed head of subject has already identified the issues clearly, in a detailed departmental evaluation, and has already introduced changes and policies which will quickly resolve many of them. He leads the department dynamically, effectively and efficiently and is an excellent role model for a subject team committed to raising standards and to the encouragement of pupils to even higher achievement. In this he is well supported by his colleagues in the subject. He has already spent money prudently and effectively on a range of new text-books, including home readers which contribute significantly to the achievement of pupils. He has a vision for the future of the department, which is based on a realistic evaluation of its strengths and the areas for its development. This is a good subject, with capacity and potential for increasing success and improvement.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

141. Overall, quality of provision is **satisfactory**, with marked differences between high quality provision in timetabled ICT lessons and inadequate provision for ICT to support learning in subject areas.

Strengths

- Teaching in well over a half of the lessons observed is good or better.
- Achievement in the GNVQ ICT courses is good because pupils are interested in their work.
- The hardware and software is very modern and powerful providing good access to the Internet from all computer rooms, despite a lower than average computer/pupil ratio.
- The network tutor, which enables teachers to guide pupils in their work directly on the screen in front of them, is a very good feature.
- Good leadership and management of timetabled ICT provision by the recently appointed head of subject ensure that all pupils receive their full entitlement to ICT within the limits of resources.
- Very good relationships between pupils and teachers lead to a very good attitude to learning and good behaviour in almost every lesson.
- Good technical support ensures that the equipment functions effectively in all areas providing an invaluable contribution to pupils' learning.

Areas for improvement

- At present, inadequate access to computers in subject areas means that most subjects do not fully contribute to the development of pupils' ICT skills nor do pupils use computers sufficiently to aid learning in subject areas.
- There is insufficient modification of worksheets used in ICT lessons to meet the needs of pupils of different levels of attainment.
- The most gifted and talented pupils need to be identified more clearly to ensure they are suitably extended and challenged by the work set.
- Opportunities for pupils to develop skills in the use of presentation software are limited.

142. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 shows that the proportion of pupils achieving at level 5 and above is higher than the national average, but this is not supported by inspection evidence. GCSE results have been broadly in line with the national average over the past three years. In GCSE, pupils achieve as well in the subject as they do in most of their other subjects. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and achieve appropriate levels for their capabilities. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls in examination results.

143. In work seen by the end of Year 9, standards are average in most strands of the National Curriculum for ICT, with the exception of control technology where progress is restricted by a lack of specialist resources. This reflects satisfactory achievement overall given these pupils' average

attainment on entry in the subject. In Year 8 in the GNVQ course, which all pupils take, standards are well above average with particular strengths in pupils' ability to use spreadsheets to carry out calculations. Almost all pupils have good practical skills, competently and confidently logging on to the network system; they effectively load and use the required software, using the keyboard and the mouse to successfully negotiate the required menus and functions. Higher and most average attaining pupils show satisfactory word processing skills but do not have sufficient opportunity to develop skills of presenting information for a sufficiently broad range of audiences. Lower attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, have satisfactory skills and produce work of an appropriate standard for their capability. There is no significant variation in the work of boys and girls in the subject.

144. Standards for the great majority of pupils at the end of Year 11 are average. The standards shown by pupils studying the key skills course and GNVQ examination course in Years 10 are broadly similar to the average expectation; this represents satisfactory achievement over time given pupils' average attainment at the start of the course. Few boys and girls are attaining at the highest levels. There is little evidence to show that the most gifted and talented pupils are identified and that appropriate extension tasks are provided to extend their skills and understanding. Within the expectations of the courses, most pupils are developing their skills in the use of a good range of computer programmes, and are competent at word processing and in using spreadsheets. Almost all pupils have good practical skills readily logging on to the network and they show good confidence and competence levels in loading the required software and files. However, whilst some subjects, particularly French, business studies and physical education, provide good opportunities for pupils to use computers to help their learning, this is not yet as comprehensive as it could be and limits progress and attainment overall by the end of Year 11.
145. Teaching and learning are very good in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Some of the teaching is outstanding. In Year 9, pupils have one timetabled ICT lesson a fortnight; this low allocation of time, coupled with problems by subjects across the curriculum to access to computer rooms, means that pupils' achievements are restricted. Overall, learning is satisfactory because of the good or very good teaching pupils receive in their timetabled lessons. Teachers' planning is thorough. For example the tasks set in the GNVQ lessons in Year 8 are topical and interesting; they are well matched to pupils' interests and very well related to the subject requirements. This means that pupils are interested in their work and almost always focused on completing work within the sharply targeted time-limits. The teaching is successful in generating a very positive attitude to learning and very good behaviour in most lessons. Pupils' show much enthusiasm in their work and are very supportive of one another readily helping each other to overcome problems. Worksheets that are produced to guide pupils in their work support the higher and most of the average attaining pupils well, but are not always sufficiently modified to meet the needs of lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs. However teachers provide pupils with high levels of individual support working with them at their computers, which, ensures that all pupils are clearly aware of what they need to do. The 'network tutor' is used to good effect to guide and support pupils' learning and give directions on the screens in front of them. It is proving to be a very powerful learning aid. Good oral assessment techniques provide pupils with a clear direction for their work and in identifying areas for improvement. Pupils' capabilities are well known by the teachers, who are sensitive to individual needs. The planned work in the GNVQ courses covers the requirements of the National Curriculum although provision for control technology is underdeveloped. The technical support staff provides an excellent contribution to pupils' learning by supporting the teaching through maintaining the computers and ensuring the efficient operation of the equipment.
146. The leadership and management of the timetabled ICT provision, including the GNVQ courses, are very good. Assessment and recording of pupils' progress are good in ICT lessons and enable pupils to make good progress since they know how well they're doing and what they need to do to improve. Outside of timetabled ICT lessons, the use of ICT is very much dependent upon the interest, expertise, experience and enthusiasm of subject teachers. At present, there is no cross-curricular co-ordinator to provide a clear whole-school direction for the subject. The assessment of pupils' ICT capability across all subjects does not yet contribute to the overall judgement on levels of attainment achieved by pupils, which explains why so few are identified as attaining at the very highest levels.

147. Standards are much as reported at the last inspection, though much higher in the taught courses, especially in Year 8. Problems with cross-curricular provision remain as demand has increased. However, although the computer to pupil ratio is not as good as the national average, the hardware and software provided is now very modern and powerful providing good access to the Internet in most parts of the school. Funding has been established to substantially increase the provision over the next few months, which will resolve most of the issues identified above especially the provision of greater access to computers for most subjects. One notable and innovative development is the GNVQ course in Year 8 where most pupils are attaining well above average. Overall, this represents good improvement and things augur well for the immediate future of ICT.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

148. The quality of provision is **good**

Strengths

- Results are above average with particular improvement in German in the last two years.
- Higher attaining in French in Year 9 and in both French and German in Years 10 and 11 are able to write extensively and with a good standard of accuracy.
- Teaching in most lessons is good, very good or excellent.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to their learning and behave well in most lessons.
- The department is very well led with visionary plans for the development of languages in the school.

Areas for improvement

- There is a need for teachers to use French and German more in their lessons and to expect their pupils to do so as well.
- There is insufficient use of different learning opportunities for pupils of differing abilities within each teaching group.
- Opportunities for pupils to use computers are inadequate in the teaching of German.

149. GCSE results in both French and German are above average when compared to national averages, with considerable improvement in German in 2001 when all pupils obtained one of the higher grades, with boys doing slightly better than girls. Boys also did better than girls in the short course in French, whilst girls' results in the long course followed national trends by being considerably better than those of boys. These results show very good achievement in German where half the pupils obtained two grades higher than their targets.
150. In work seen in Year 9, standards are above average, and especially high in the fast-track top set where pupils are competent in their understanding of e-mails sent from a French school, and in their ability to write fluently and correctly. Lower attaining pupils understand what they hear, but have more difficulty with speaking and writing. In German, which pupils have been learning for considerably less time, standards are average. The standards reached by most pupils show good achievement in relation to their starting points when they started learning particular languages; some high attainers are achieving very well
151. Overall standards are well above average at the end of Year 11 in both French and German. Many pupils are able to write extensively in both languages with considerable degree of accuracy, using a wide range of tenses and vocabulary. Those learning German are able to speak with reasonable fluency about holidays, whilst those doing French are more hesitant. Nonetheless, achievement is very good with most pupils who are learning languages in Years 10 and 11 progressing very well.
152. Amongst the reasons for pupils' very good achievements are their very good, and sometimes excellent, behaviour and attitudes; the only exception was one Year 8 class. Most pupils are well prepared, co-operate with the teacher, work well in paired activities, and are able to stay on-task for the majority of the lesson. In the fast-track Year 9 class seen during the inspection, pupils were able to work on their own replying to e-mail correspondence, whilst in many classes there was good use of dictionaries.

153. Teaching is good overall; in only a minority of lessons is it less than good. In nearly half the lessons observed it was very good or excellent. Teachers have good language skills with three native speakers of French or German. They use a good range of teaching skills, which promotes good learning, with good use of equipment such as overhead projectors and tape recorders to reinforce understanding and oral skills. In one Year 8 lesson there was good use of mime to aid understanding, and repetition using soft and loud voice alternately to practise the pronunciation of new phrases. Lessons are well planned and prepared; as a result, pupils are taken methodically through their learning with one point leading naturally on to the next. One Year 10 French class was involved in an excellent game which required both good organisation and good control and was effective in enabling pupils to practise all four language skills in a few minutes. In one Year 8 French class, there was excellent learning of possessive adjectives through the use of miniature white boards on which pupils wrote down the correct form, which could then be easily monitored by the teacher. Teachers have good relationships with their pupils, exercising firm, often humorous control over their classes. As a result pupils learn well, and, in discussions with them, they say that their learning is good and they are able to demonstrate this in their responses in class and in the standard of work done at home. Lower attaining pupils, including some with special educational needs, in one Year 8 class were following the *Français extra* course; they were developing good understanding of body language through the teacher's good preparation of material, good use of appropriate television clips and very firm control.
154. In a minority of lessons seen during the inspection, the teaching was unsatisfactory. In one case this was because the work was insufficiently challenging, whilst, in the other, pupils were not given enough opportunity to practise new expressions before the teacher moved on to another activity. Whilst pupils are divided into groups according to ability after Year 7, there was little evidence during the inspection of different work for different groups of pupils within sets, so some opportunities are missed for all pupils to achieve to their fullest potential. Some pupils in a Year 11 French class, for example, were insufficiently challenged by some of the work, and as a result their learning was not as rapid as it could have been.
155. The use of ICT in French is very good, especially in Year 9. The booklet of ideas for the use of computers in that language is excellent. However, there is no corresponding use of information technology in German, which is a weakness of provision at present.
156. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards have generally improved, especially in German. There has been a good improvement in the use of computers in French, and the developments for accelerated learning for higher attaining pupils give a very good message of high expectations in language learning, which is shown in the standards being reached.
157. The modern languages curriculum is very good in Years 7, 8 and 9 with forward-thinking provision of fast-track French in Years 8 and 9 and good opportunities for higher attaining pupils to study two languages. Provision for lower attaining pupils is also very good, with the development of *Français extra* which includes taster courses in other foreign languages. Unusually about a third of pupils in Years 10 and 11 do not study a foreign language, but for the remainder there is good provision. There are very good plans for the development of French in 2002 at AS level for those who have passed their GCSE at the end of Year 9.
158. The department is well managed. The accommodation, apart from the temporary classroom, is very good, with attractive displays of work and other language materials which encourage learning.

MUSIC

159. Overall the quality of provision in music is **good**, with the potential to become very good.

Strengths

- Standards in music are above average.
- There is good and often very good teaching of pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- Extra curricular activities are very good in their variety and quality.

- There is very good leadership by the head of subject.

Areas for Improvement

- Present accommodation difficulties restrict the variety of teaching and learning styles.
- Inadequate access to computers restricts some learning opportunities for pupils.
- The large number of teachers, some teaching only limited amounts of music, makes co-ordination and management of the subject difficult to achieve.

160. Standards of work seen during the inspection are above average overall for all pupils. Pupils arrive in Year 7 with a variety of musical skills and knowledge. They progress well and standards at the end of Year 9 are above average, showing good achievement for most pupils. Performing and composition skills are high compared to pupils' oral and written evaluations that are less well developed. Pupils in Year 9 lower attaining sets achieve well when the tasks are appropriate and they are given clear guidance and support. This achievement is also true of pupils with special educational needs. No teacher assessments were made in 2000, but those undertaken in 2001 for pupils at the end of Year 9 indicate results above the national average. This picture is mirrored by the work seen during the inspection where girls achieve a little better than boys. However, during lesson observations, boys were often more forthcoming and confident with answers than girls.
161. Examples of very good performing and composing skills among pupils who choose to study GCSE music were seen during the inspection. These skills assist them in their GCSE work. The GCSE results for both boys and girls in 2001 were significantly above the national average. Boys and girls equally gained the highest grades. In work seen, pupils' standards in Year 11 are above average with good achievement. For example, pupils show good understanding of arranging popular melodies for Steel Pans and discuss musical techniques maturely. One pupil working on a ground bass compositions built up interest and complexity using ideas and influences from a piece by Michael Nyman which had been played to the class.
162. Teaching and learning are good overall. In Years 7 to 9, it ranges from excellent to unsatisfactory. It is good and often very good in Years 10 and 11. In the very best teaching, seen in a Year 8 lesson, pupils practised call and response rhythm patterns using African drums. The task was explained clearly, a brisk pace maintained throughout the lesson and pupils enthused to improve and develop their work. They were encouraged to consider the life and times within African villages and the lesson included opportunities for them to dance along with the drumming patterns. The enjoyment and involvement of all in the class was evident throughout the lesson as they explored and developed more intricate rhythmic patterns. The structure of the lesson also meant that pupils could be challenged musically according to their ability ensuring that all made excellent progress in their learning. In the best lessons, key words are used so that pupils develop a library of musical language that they can use in oral and written evaluations. The weaknesses in teaching occur when the tasks set and the time span given are not crisp enough to ensure that all pupils learn successfully; pupils are not given sufficient guidance and left too long to work on an activity. In these lessons there are low expectations and time is wasted on non-musical activities. However the accommodation available for some music lessons restricts the teaching and learning styles. In some rooms, there is not enough space for successful practical work. It is only because the pupils behave carefully and sensibly that practical work can take place. The teaching for examination classes is linked closely to the examination requirements. However pupils are taken through a series of well planned activities designed to develop their knowledge and understanding of music history, terms and conventions. Appropriate use of teachers' personal experiences helps lessons come alive and promotes good learning. Marking is used to help pupils understand how to improve their written work. In a Year 10 lesson, the teacher made very good use of a pupil's composition in order to explain a concept to the whole class. This use of one of their peer's work helped the class relate and understand what was needed to compose successfully. Pupils make use of the Internet to help them research information. However, at present, the subject does not have enough computers and suitable software to use for composition, and this restricts their learning. More appropriate programs are also needed to help those pupils who find it difficult to use staff notation.

163. Pupils have very good attitudes to their lessons and the variety of extra-curricular activities they are offered. Participation and commitment are high. The teachers are to be congratulated for the amount of time they give during lunch times and after school to rehearsals that so successfully enables pupils to achieve well. The school has had a good reputation for music making. The range has recently been broadened to become fully inclusive offering something for all pupils for example Steel Pans group and the Rock group. This now ensures that pupils develop an appreciation and understanding of the diversity and range of music beyond the traditional western styles. Through these activities and the many opportunities taken in lessons, music makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral social and cultural development. More pupils are having instrumental lessons than at the time of the previous inspection. However though these lessons are of good quality and pupils achieve good results, lessons are still taught in rooms the quality of which is unsatisfactory, reducing the full potential of instrumental lessons.
164. Since the previous inspection, music has built upon the established tradition for ensemble work and concerts. Leadership and management are very good. Since the appointment of the current head of subject, a review and analysis of the strengths and weaknesses has been undertaken in order to plan for the future. This has already resulted in a new assessment format, which is used to build up a musical picture of pupils in Years 7 to 9 and enables tracking of their progress to be undertaken effectively. This is linked to the regular recording of pupils work. At present the quality of the recording equipment used does not do justice to the fine pieces of work produced by many pupils. The scattered nature of the teaching rooms for music means that it is difficult to establish a corporate identity for the department. This lack of cohesion is exacerbated by the large number of part time staff, not all sharing a common commitment to change and to adopt the high standards displayed by the head of subject. There is a lack of variety of research materials in the library; at present, they represent a traditional focus for music and as yet do not reflect a diverse music curriculum.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

165. Overall, the quality of provision in physical education is **very good**.

Strengths

- Teaching and learning are very good; teachers plan lessons using a range of activities, which allows all groups of pupils to learn successfully.
- There is very good leadership and management.
- Extra-curricular provision is very good.
- Pupils work very well together and share ideas freely.
- Whole year groups are entered for the GCSE examination.
- Sporting links with the community are very good.

Areas for improvement

- Indoor accommodation is outdated.
- The use of ICT to enhance pupils' learning is underdeveloped.
- Homework for Year 10 and Year 11 pupils is not set, restricting learning opportunities and achievements.
- Curricular links with partner primary schools need strengthening.

166. Overall, standards in physical education are above national averages at the end of Years 9 and 11. This represents good achievement given these pupils' average attainment on entry. GCSE examination results have varied over the last three years. In 2001 and 1999, the proportions of pupils gaining higher grades were below the national average; results in 2000 were well above the national average. However, in all these years, all pupils taking the examination have achieved a GCSE pass, though, overall, pupils' results in their other subjects tend to be better than those they achieved in physical education. High proportions of pupils are entered each year and in 2002, all Year 11 pupils will take the examination. Many individuals and teams achieve highly at county, regional and, for some, national levels, in a wide-range of sports.
167. Standards in lessons and work seen by Year 9 are above average and show good improvement from work in Year 7; most pupils are, therefore, achieving well. Opportunities, provided through the

extensive extra-curricular programme, allow talented boys and girls to achieve well beyond expected levels. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well by Years 9 and 11. Teaching is well adapted to meet their needs. Most Year 9 pupils judge performance well; they use good individual skills and spatial awareness, to beat opponents. Pupils understand what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. Higher attaining pupils by Year 9 can plan and use tactics effectively, and their performance levels are enhanced by good personal fitness. Lower attaining pupils achieve satisfactory individual skills in isolation, but cannot apply them effectively under the pressure of game situations.

168. Standards in lessons and work seen by Year 11 are above average and achievement is good in relation to standards at the beginning of Year 10. Some boys and girls are achieving at high levels in representative sport. They demonstrate high levels of skill, tactical awareness and fitness. Most pupils plan performance well, particularly in dance and the tactical aspects of games. They use knowledge of fitness principles to plan training programmes. Lower attainers, including some with special needs, have below average standards of presentation and extended writing skills. Most pupils, across all years, express themselves well due to teachers' high emphasis on providing opportunities for them to think for themselves. Year 10 and 11 pupils' literacy skills are satisfactory, but lack the detail and reinforcement that would come from doing homework, a possible explanation of the lower standards of examination results compared with work seen during the inspection. Most pupils' numeracy skills are good and they cope well in the measuring, recording and analysis of fitness testing data. Pupils' ICT skills in the subject, by Year 9, are underdeveloped due to lack of opportunity. Access is improved by Year 11 and the majority can carry out research tasks using computers.
169. The quality of teaching and learning is good in Years 7, 8 and 9; it is very good in Years 10 and 11. The high quality of teaching is a major factor in promoting the very good attitudes and behaviour that pupils show. They respond well, work hard and want to do well; as a result, learning is often very good. Small numbers underachieve, because of poor concentration. Very good management of pupils creates a purposeful and safe learning environment. The depth of teachers' knowledge has a very positive impact on learning. Continuity and progress are good across the full age-range, due to teaching which is adapted to challenge all pupils and schemes of work that build on previous learning. In a Year 7 basketball lesson, for example, lower attaining pupils progressed well because the teacher simplified instructions, modified tasks and used demonstrations. The learning of higher attainers, including the talented, is accelerated by extension tasks, grouping and extra-curricular activities. Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to learn independently in a high percentage of lessons. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils planned, performed and judged dance routines. Their learning was enhanced by the teacher's very good use of audio and visual support equipment. Pupils' achievements and progress in such tasks are good and, often, very good. When the opportunities for active learning are more limited, progress by some pupils, particularly lower attainers, is not as good. Most pupils learn and use technical vocabulary well because of the emphasis teachers give to key words in lessons; oral communication skills are developing well, through the many opportunities to plan and evaluate work. Teachers provide satisfactory opportunities for Year 10 and 11 pupils to develop their ICT skills, particularly to research information. In the other years, poor access to resources limits the impact of ICT on pupils' learning.
170. Leadership and management are very good. The head of subject is providing great vision in the subject's development, particularly in what is taught, teaching and learning, and systems to monitor, evaluate and improve standards. He is a driving force behind the school's very strong bid for Sports College status, which if successful, will bring great benefits to the school and surrounding community. A dedicated team of specialist teachers and well-qualified sports coaches provides very good support and expertise which enable the broad curriculum to be successfully taught. Assessment systems are good and data is well-used to set realistic targets for pupils. The Director of Sport, in his role as the area's Schools Sports Co-ordinator, is creating excellent sporting links between the school and community, including partner primary schools. The school is unstinting in its role as a facilitator for local sports clubs and schools, so enhancing considerably its contribution to the local community. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Teachers have very good relationships with pupils and this is reflected in pupils' very positive attitudes to physical education.

171. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. Teaching has improved overall from good to very good. A broader curriculum is offered and all teaching is now undertaken by specialists. The Sportsmark Gold Award has been gained and GCSE dance successfully introduced. Non-participants are now fully occupied in all lessons; litter is no longer a problem and lessons are very well planned. The provision of textbooks for whole year groups is being addressed. In order to improve further, the department needs to provide better access to ICT, re-introduce homework for examination groups, provide leadership courses in Year 11 to extend opportunities, and to improve curricular links with partner primary schools to promote better continuity between the different stages of education. Indoor accommodation is currently inadequate for teachers and pupils to develop the full potential of physical education, but this will change dramatically when the new building programme is completed.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

172. The quality of provision is **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards of attainment and achievement in Years 10 and 11 have improved since the last inspection; standards are above average.
- Pupils' positive attitudes promote good achievement in the subject.
- The quality of teaching and learning in the AS level Philosophy of Religion and Religious Ethics course is excellent.
- The department is very well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to use ICT to enhance their work in religious education.
- The presentation of some school produced resources lacks variety and does not always meet the needs of all pupils.

173. All pupils follow a GCSE short course in Years 10 and 11. They were entered for the examination for the first time in 2000 when results at the higher grades were close to the national average. Results in 2001 were better than those in 2000; nearly a quarter of the candidates obtained an A* grade. Pupils also have the option to take an AS level course in the Philosophy of Religion and Religious Ethics in Years 10 and 11. In the first examination taken in 2001 all but one candidate obtained a pass grade and over 60 per cent obtained A or B grades, showing remarkably high achievement.
174. In work seen by Year 9, standards are above those expected in the Statements of Attainment of the Brighton and Hove Agreed Syllabus. Pupils have a good understanding of Christianity and aspects of other religious traditions. They also appreciate the importance of using religious language correctly and are able to discuss issues successfully, as in a Year 8 lesson when pupils debated a range of contemporary moral dilemmas, giving well-argued reasons for their points of view. The achievement of pupils, including those with special educational needs, is good in Years 7 to 9. They make clear gains in knowledge and understanding, and by Year 9 pupils' written work contains explanations as well as descriptions of religious beliefs and practices.
175. In work seen by Year 11 in the GCSE short course, standards are above average. Pupils show a thoughtful appreciation of moral and social issues, such as those related to marriage and the family, and to the roles of men and women. They also understand the relevant religious perspectives from the Christian and Hindu traditions. The achievement of pupils is good. They master the content of the course successfully and their written work becomes more relevant and focused, although lower attaining pupils have difficulty in using their knowledge to answer examination questions. In work seen by Year 11 in the AS level course, standards are above the average expected from pupils who normally take this course when they are in a school or college sixth form; achievement is very good in relation to standards at the beginning of Year 10. Pupils have a good grasp of the ideas and arguments covered in the course; for example, they were impressive in the way they applied their understanding of utilitarianism and situation ethics to a

range of ethical dilemmas. They make rapid progress in developing their skills to think through issues logically and rationally.

176. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good. They are interested and involved in the topics they are studying, and they enjoy being challenged to think deeply about questions of meaning and value. This has a positive impact on the quality of pupils' learning and achievement in the subject. In the AS level lessons, for example, excellent relationships, based on mutual respect, contribute significantly to the progress made in lessons.
177. The quality of teaching and learning is good in all years; it is excellent in the AS level course. In many lessons the depth of teachers' knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject help to motivate pupils and engage their interest. In a Year 8 lesson, for example, the teacher's expert explanation of Jewish dietary laws, using good resources and well-judged examples, enabled pupils to understand the importance of 'keeping kosher'. Expectations of what pupils can achieve in religious education is high; in the most effective lessons, pupils are really challenged to think deeply and logically about religious and ethical issues. Teachers plan lessons well, although sometimes written tasks are not explained clearly enough, which holds back progress. Teachers use a good variety of methods. Video material and religious artefacts, for example, help pupils understand the importance of religious beliefs and practices in different traditions. In the best lessons teachers question pupils very effectively, as in a Year 10 AS level Philosophy of Religion lesson, when rigorous, exact questioning ensured that pupils understood aspects of Kant's thinking about the existence of God. Teachers take lessons at a good pace, although sometimes work is rushed and opportunities to extend and clarify pupils' thinking are missed. Teachers pay close attention to developing literacy skills, which helps pupils use correct vocabulary and write well-argued essays. At the moment the use of ICT to enhance pupils' work is under-developed.
178. The subject is very well led and managed. Four newly qualified teachers have made a successful start to their careers during the last two years and have been given excellent support. The school makes very good timetable provision for religious education, and the subject contributes significantly to pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Very good improvement has taken place since the last inspection. The GCSE and AS level courses have been successfully introduced in Years 10 and 11 and this has helped to raise the level of attainment and achievement. Good procedures for assessing pupils' work are now in place and the marking of books has improved. Very thorough school-produced resources on all topics mean that pupils have a useful basis of information for their work. However, the presentation of some of these resources lacks variety and does not always meet the needs of all pupils.

VOCATIONAL COURSES

179. The vocational studies areas include GNVQ intermediate and foundation ICT, key skills levels 1 and 2 ICT, and GNVQ foundation science with the leisure and tourism option. These areas are included within the respective subject sections.

Business education

180. Overall, the quality of provision in business education is **very good**.

Strengths

- Public examination results and current pupils' work are well above average.
- Good teaching results in good learning, with well planned and well taught lessons.
- There are very good links with the business community, particularly in ventures such as 'Young Enterprise'.
- Pupils' responses are very good, with very positive attitudes towards business education.
- There is good effective and efficient management and leadership of the department.
- Good vision and planning by head of department for future development and growth of the subject will take it forward further.

Areas for improvement

- There is scope to widen the curriculum to include GCSE vocational subjects.
- The head of subject has little time to develop the subject and monitor new areas of growth
- Accommodation is only just satisfactory because the rooms are insufficiently furnished and equipped as business related specialist rooms.
- Learning will be enhanced further with a wider range of teaching methods, such as the use of closed circuit television.

181. By the end of Year 11, the standards attained by pupils are well above average. Over the last four years, there has been a trend of increasingly high results. In 2000, 83 per cent of pupils attained a higher grade. Results in 2001, in the GNVQ intermediate course, all obtained a higher grade, well above the national levels. A pleasing feature of the results in 2001 is that girls and boys attained equally well. Pupils' files indicate high attainment and are of well above average quality. Pupils are now developing the art of writing in depth and their work is well organised, well structured and well presented. In lessons, pupils display good knowledge of their course of study. They have a real understanding of the aims and objectives of the business world in general and of the particular businesses which they are studying in depth. For example, Year 11 pupils, studying business objectives, evaluate the significance of the mission statement of a leading hotel in Brighton, and are effective and adept at distinguishing features of the statement which appertain to the organisation's workforce and those which target its customers.
182. Pupils' overall achievements by the end of Year 11 are good, particularly, but not exclusively, in their maturing awareness and understanding of the functional aspects of business. This is demonstrated to good effect in their business meetings and dealings which they conduct as part of their involvement in the 'Young Enterprise' scheme. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and they are skilful at linking several facts together to make a comprehensive and cohesive business picture. Higher attaining pupils, including the gifted and talented pupils, augment their knowledge well with analytical skills.
183. Teaching is good overall throughout this stage of the pupils' learning and pupils learn well as a result. No lesson observed during the inspection was less than satisfactory and some lessons were very good. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject. Lessons are well planned and well prepared and lead to good learning by pupils as they are taught in a logical and coherent way. A characteristic of business studies teaching is the teachers' belief in the value of independent learning and enquiry. Teachers are very adept at being facilitators of learning, yet they are equally skilled at timely intervention in order to maintain the momentum of learning. For example, in a Year 11 class studying business locations, the teacher intervened half way through the class, and with a quick question and answer session, and redirected the class towards new enquiries. This had a strong impact on pupils' learning, since by refocusing the pupils on other areas of study, the teacher ensured that pupils were stimulated by the challenge and applied their best intellectual and creative efforts to fulfil the new tasks he set. Overall, the quality of teaching makes a significant impact on pupils' learning, attainment and progress.
184. The responses of pupils are good. Pupils generally show good application to their work. They respond diligently, settle quickly to task and sustain concentration. They work well collaboratively and independently. Their positive behaviour and responses, which is often a direct result of good teaching and good classroom management, are important factors in their good learning.
185. The subject has clear marking and assessment policies which involve formative, diagnostic and summative assessments. Teachers use the assessment of pupils' work well to inform future planning and teaching. Teacher produced assessor feedback is extensive and focused and forms an effective basis for self-assessment and target setting. Staffing is a particular strength. Teachers have both the qualifications and the experience to meet the needs of the pupils and their courses of study. ICT facilities are good and are well used, and the pupils are encouraged in the application of numeracy within their studies, and this improves their skills in this area.
186. However, there are some areas for development. The curriculum, though reasonably wide, does not yet contain vocational courses at GCSE. The accommodation, and particularly the corridors and stairwells leading to the business studies area, do not create an environment conducive to the study of the subject, which means that teachers and pupils have to work particularly hard to

achieve present standards. There is no special business room and no business studies office, again presenting difficulties for the successful teaching of the subject. The current head of subject is also the GNVQ co-ordinator. He has little time in his timetable to monitor and develop all the courses to the highest level.

187. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The very experienced head of subject is effective and efficient, and is committed both to the concept of vocational education and to high standards. In both matters, he is well supported by his staff. Under his leadership, the subject has produced a set of good documents for all aspects of its work, which are informed and informative. This is a good subject, making very good provision, with even more capacity and potential for increasing future success.