

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **HOLMESDALE COMMUNITY SCHOOL**

Snodland

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 118796

Headteacher: Mr. Ian Hobson

Reporting inspector: Terence Parish  
15465

Dates of inspection: 12<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> February 2001

Inspection number: 209061

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11-17

Gender of pupils: mixed

School address: Holmesdale Community School  
Malling Road  
Snodland  
Kent

Postcode: ME 6 5HS

Telephone number: 01634240416

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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Richard Sams

Date of previous inspection: 23<sup>rd</sup> November, 1998

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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15465	Terence Parish	Registered inspector	Information Communication Technology (ICT)	What sort of school is it?  The school's results and pupils' or students' achievements.  How well are pupils or students taught?  How well is the school led and managed?  What should the school do to improve further?
9282	Clare Lorenz	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development.  How well does the school care for its pupils or students?  How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
30648	Brian Skelton	Team inspector	English Drama	
31100	Geoff Hunter	Team inspector	Mathematics	
18543	Colin Lower	Team inspector	Science	
27407	Bill Stoneham	Team inspector	History Vocational Sixth Form	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils or students?
30215	Helen Feasey	Team inspector	Geography	
21954	Terry Chipp	Team inspector	Art and Design	
8859	Tom Dodd	Team inspector	Design and Technology	
12972	Tony Weaden	Team inspector	Physical Education	
7636	Anil Sinha	Team inspector	French	
29955	Don Jordan	Team inspector	Religious Education Equal Opportunities	
1068	Jan Allcorn	Team inspector	Special Educational Needs	

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

Holmesdale is a mixed secondary modern 11- 17 school. Sixth form students are in Year 12 only. The number of pupils on roll, 402, is much lower than in most schools. Pupil numbers are rising rapidly and the school is over-subscribed in September 2001. Almost all pupils are white and there are none with English as an Additional Language. The overall attainment of pupils, when they leave primary schools to enter Holmesdale, is well below average and this has been the case for some years. There are a higher proportion of pupils with average or better attainment in Years 7 and 8 than in Years 9, 10 and 11. The proportions of pupils having special educational needs and having statements of special educational needs are both about twice the national average. The community aspect of the school is very successful. There are very close links with a nursery school, adult education and local industry.

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

This is an improving school. Very good leadership, good management and good teaching have enabled pupils' standards of attainment to rise dramatically in the last two years. Though examination results in 2000 are still below those of similar schools, pupils are now able to learn effectively in a good atmosphere. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good and they also respond well to opportunities provided for them. The school is expensive to run but gives satisfactory value for money. The small sixth form provides students with a very good experience in which they succeed better than most. It is cost effective.

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

- Raises the self -esteem of pupils.
- Forges good relationships between pupils and between pupils and teachers.
- Fosters good behaviour and attitudes.
- Standards of pupils' work in design and technology, history, business studies, child development and GCSE information and communication technology (ICT) are at least above those of similar schools.
- Works very well with local industry and other organisations to support the development and aspirations of pupils.

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

- Standards of pupils' literacy and numeracy.
- Provision for music in all years and drama in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils' attainment in science by the end of Year 9.
- Specialist provision for teaching and supporting pupils with special educational needs.
- Pupils' targets for academic improvement.

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

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

The school was last inspected in November 1998. Very good improvement has been made since then. Standards of work at GCSE have risen substantially. Teaching is better. The behaviour of pupils is better. Governors are now fully involved in the work of the school. Financial planning is rigorous. The debt burden inherited from a few years ago is about to be resolved. Planning is now effective and involves middle management more. Teachers' use of assessment data to help them plan lessons has recently begun. Work is also in hand to raise the levels of pupils' literacy and numeracy but greater efforts are needed. The sixth form curriculum is now broader but music is currently not on the curriculum due to staffing difficulties.



## STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with				<b>Key</b>
	all schools in the country			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	E	E	E	See note	well above average    A above average        B average                C below average        D well below average    E

(NOTE: No valid GCSE comparison can be made with similar schools as the data is not yet available.)

Pupils who took GCSE examinations in 2000 achieved satisfactorily if their prior attainment at the end of 1998 is taken into account. In other words, they did as well as might have been expected. The proportion of pupils who were awarded 5 or more A\*-C grades in 2000 was 26 per cent, well up on the 10 per cent seen in 1998. The school's statutory targets for GCSE were well exceeded by this success, but were appropriate at the time. The trend of improvement is faster than the national trend, but further significant rises do depend on significant improvements in English, mathematics, science and French results. Results in these subjects are well below national averages and are adversely affected by low standards of literacy and numeracy. However, results in all of them are improving and pupils generally make at least satisfactory progress by the end of Year 11.

Standards of pupils' work in business education, child development, design and technology, history and GCSE ICT are close to and sometimes above national averages. Pupils achieve at least well in them. In geography, standards of work are below average but comparatively better in Key Stage 3 where pupils achieve well. Pupils' standards of work in physical education are satisfactory in Years 7 and 8 and at the end of Year 11. They achieve satisfactorily overall. In religious education standards are below average at the end of Year 9 and 11 but pupils' progress is good. Standards in art and design are historically satisfactory but are unsatisfactory recently due to temporary staffing. Sixth form students achieve very well and their GNVQ performance in 2000 was above the national average.

Results in English, mathematics and science tests at the end of Year 9 in 2000 were well below average overall and science results were very low, in the bottom 5 per cent nationally. The overall trend of improvement has been slower than the national trend. English test results improved a little in 2000. During the inspection, pupils' work seen was generally better than that indicated by test results. This is partly due to the better performance of Years 7 and 8. Poor literacy does affect test performance but the school took advantage of support available to overcome such problems last year. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in all years and are successful at GCSE.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Most pupils enjoy school and want to learn.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Most pupils are polite and courteous. A small number sometimes cause problems in lessons where teaching strategies are inconsistent.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Pupils generally respect each other and teachers. Youth Action and Friendship Groups give pupils opportunities to act responsibly.
Attendance	Satisfactory over the year. In line with the national average.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	Aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	Very 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.*

Almost all lessons were satisfactory or better. Around two thirds were good or better and almost a quarter were very good. 4 lessons were unsatisfactory, all were taught by temporary teachers.

Teaching in English and mathematics is good and in science it is satisfactory. Literacy skills are not sufficiently taught in all lessons. For example, pupils' poor spelling is frequently not picked up. However, literacy is generally taught well in Year 7 basic skills lessons and there is some good practice in subjects. Numeracy skills are well taught in mathematics lessons and reinforced in some subjects such as history, geography and design and technology.

Most teachers have many strengths, including, knowledge of their subject, pupil management and high expectations. There is inconsistency in the rigour and frequency of marking pupils' work and in the setting of appropriate homework. Pupils learn best when they understand exactly what is expected of them and know how well they have done and how to improve. Many teachers plan their lessons well, so pupils have this information. Temporary teachers, who had little time to establish a rapport with pupils, sometimes had unsatisfactory lessons.

The inspection found teaching in design and technology, history and business education to be very good. It is good in all other subjects except art and design and science. Art and design teaching is currently unsatisfactory. It has been taught by a number of supply teachers, due to a leave of absence, both prior to and during the inspection.

Pupils with special educational needs generally learn well and make good progress. Teachers are supported by a number of good learning support assistants and teaching is best when these are well integrated into the work or are working with small groups of pupils. There is some provision for more able pupils through 'express' groups in English, mathematics and science. Music is currently not taught and all pupils are poorly provided for in this sphere.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The quality and range of the curriculum available is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. However, the statutory National Curriculum is not in place as no music is taught.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory in all years. There are many learning support assistants who do a good job but there are also many pupils that require support.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Satisfactory overall, though provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory as there is no daily act of worship, no music and, recently, weak art. Moral development is satisfactory. Social development and cultural development are good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Satisfactory overall. Procedures for ensuring pupils' good behaviour are good as is support and guidance for pupils. Procedures to monitor and improve attendance in lessons need attention. Pupils' academic performance is satisfactorily monitored. The school has effective links with parents.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good leadership by the headteacher and good management overall. There is a clear commitment by all to improve the school. Many teachers take on extra duties without reward.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors take full responsibility for actions needed to move the school forwards. They are both knowledgeable and willing to help in any way they can. They are aware of statutory weaknesses in the curriculum.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good evaluation and effective action enabled the school to improve significantly since the last inspection.
The strategic use of resources	The use of resources is very good and 'best value' is pursued well. There are insufficient permanent teachers and technical support staff. There are not enough books and computers though the quality of many is good.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progress pupils make.</li> <li>• Teaching.</li> <li>• School is approachable.</li> <li>• Helps pupils mature.</li> <li>• Management of school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homework (amount and consistency).</li> <li>• Information about pupils' progress.</li> <li>• Closer working with parents.</li> <li>• Number and range of activities outside lessons.</li> </ul>

Inspectors agree with all the positive views and most of the others. Homework is inconsistently set and the homework timetable is not always adhered to. Annual academic reports to parents have been unsatisfactory but are in the process of being improved and the recent opportunity to discuss pupils' progress was a considerable success. There was no evidence to suggest the school is not willing to

work closely with parents. There are a number of activities available to pupils and the range is smaller than that found in larger schools. However, there are fewer teachers to run them.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

1. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school has consistently been well below average over the last five years. Pupils in Year 7 and 8 have a wider range of attainment than those who are older and are sometimes producing work at least of a similar standard of the current Year 9.

2. Around half of the work seen from pupils in Years 7 to 9 was average or better and 14 per cent was above average. Only 37 per cent of work from pupils in Years 10 and 11 was average or better and only a very small amount above average.

3. Results of tests at the end of Year 9 remain as they were at the time of the last report, well below average. Science results are weaker than English or mathematics. The overall trend of school improvement, since the last inspection, has been in line with the national trend. Results improved a little faster between 1999 and 2000. Between 1998 and 2000, girls performed better than boys in English but boys did better in mathematics and science.

4. At the time of the last inspection GCSE results were very low compared to those of all schools and of similar schools. Since then results have improved dramatically, from 10 per cent of pupils gaining 5 or more A\*-C grades then to 26 per cent in 2000. The proportion of pupils attaining 5 or more A\*-G grades is below, but close to, the national average. Overall results remain well below those of all schools. A comparison with similar schools is difficult as national data for secondary schools is not yet available. Neither is this secondary school particularly typical, as it is within a particularly rigorous selective system, and has suffered difficulties in management in the years leading up to the last inspection. These difficulties have now been resolved. There are also a higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs than is typical. It is possible to say that pupils who took GCSEs in 2000 achieved satisfactorily if their attainment 2 years earlier, at the end of their Year 9, is considered.

5. School GCSE results are improving faster than the national trend. However, there are fluctuations and will be more, particularly when the current small number of pupils in Year 9 take their examinations. The absence of a handful of pupils during examinations has a much greater significance than in an average school. Girls' and boys' results also fluctuate. In 1998 and 2000 girls attained significantly better than boys but in 1999 boys did a little better than girls. These swings make a difference to overall results when there is an imbalance between the numbers of girls and boys. There are far more boys than girls in the current Year 7.

6. The school's statutory targets for GCSE results were well exceeded by results in 2000. The targets set were cautious but appropriate given the initial difficulties faced. New targets move the school forwards but have to be realistically set against the known prior attainment of pupils. As their performance improves in Years 7 to 9 so targets can increase significantly.

7. GCSE subjects that did well in 2000 were business studies, design and technology, history, information technology and English literature. French was the weakest subject and this can be linked to difficulties in staffing, since resolved. Girls and boys were also weak in English. Girls did comparatively less well than boys in mathematics and science and boys did less well in geography. In 2000 there was only one examination course in the sixth form, GNVQ business education. Almost all students passed

and achieved well compared to their prior attainment. This is better than the national picture. Whilst pupils' attainment in many subjects suffers from low standards of pupils' literacy and, sometimes, numeracy, the strongest subjects have overcome this with particularly good standards of teaching. They do show what might be achieved as literacy levels rise and all teachers work to improve them further.

8. English Year 9 test results improved significantly in 2000 and they are improving faster than the national trend. Girls do better but boys are catching up. The proportion of pupils gaining an A\*-C grade in English language increased. A high proportion of pupils entered for English literature gained an A\*-C grade. Standards of work seen remain well below average but show an improvement since the time of the last inspection. Pupils achieve well at both key stages.

### ***Literacy***

9. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are below national standards at both key stages. How they express themselves does improve as they have more experience and use of technical words. However, even in top 'express groups' their speaking can be ungrammatical and disjointed. In Key Stage 4, higher attaining pupils can discuss their work, for example a play, well but use language that is not sufficiently precise. Pupils' reading skills are well below national standards for many pupils at both key stages. They have insufficient practice within lessons, for homework, or through informal times at school. Pupils' quality of writing is broadly in line with national expectations for those of highest prior attainment and below or well below national average for just over half of the pupils. Pupils' writing is poorer in Year 9 than in Year 8. However, writing has improved since the last inspection and higher attaining GCSE pupils can write well and form well reasoned arguments in essays. Pupils' spelling is often poor or very poor and the very good practice observed in history, where pupils are required to help themselves by using dictionaries, is not seen across the school.

10. Mathematics Year 9 test results were well below national averages in 2000 and did not show improvement between 1998 and 2000. However, this inspection shows that standards are now improving due to better teaching. GCSE results in 2000 were well below average for the higher grades but in line for the rest. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Pupils achieve well.

### ***Numeracy.***

11. Pupils' standards of numeracy are well below national averages in all years. Most pupils have weak skills, both mentally and on paper, in spite of the systematic and effective approach to the teaching of number in the mathematics department. There are, for instance, few pupils whose understanding of division is totally secure. Nevertheless pupils use calculators appropriately, for the most part, and can employ their mathematics in most areas of the curriculum as, for example, in design technology where they showed they could measure and weigh accurately and work out the costs of products.

12. Science Year 9 test results in 2000 were well below the national average and poorer than mathematics or English. There was some improvement from 1999. Work seen is better than that indicated by test results and pupils' poor literacy and numeracy does not help them perform appropriately in these tests or at GCSE. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 achieve satisfactorily, better than in Year 9. Inconsistency in staffing does not support better achievement. GCSE results in 2000 were well below average for the higher grades but above average for the others. Results are better than at the time of the last inspection and the proportion of pupils attaining higher grades has significantly increased.

13. Art results in 2000 were below average at the end of Year 9 and in the proportion of pupils attaining A\*-C grades at GCSE. Overall GCSE results were very close to the national average. Pupils' standard of work from last year is satisfactory and shows that they achieved satisfactorily. Recent attainment and progress is unsatisfactory due to instability in staffing. Fortunately this problem ended just after the inspection.

14. Pupils' attainment in design and technology is above average at the end of Year 9 and at least in line (a variety of courses are offered) at the end of Year 11. In 2000, the proportion of pupils attaining higher GCSE grades was higher than national averages. Work seen is of a good standard and pupils make good progress.

15. At the end of Year 9 in geography, pupils' attainment is below average but is improving in Years 7 and 8. GCSE results in 2000 were well below average but show significant increase in the proportion of pupils attaining the higher grades since the last inspection. The pupils who take geography have tended to have lower prior attainment than those who take history. Pupils achieve well by the end of Key Stage 3 and satisfactorily by the end of Key Stage 4.

16. In history, pupils' standards of work are in line with national expectations by the end of Year 9 and close to national averages at GCSE. Pupils achieve very well at both key stages. History was good at the time of the last inspection but has still improved and uses ICT well to support pupils' learning.

17. Pupils' standards of work in ICT are generally below average by the end of Year 9 due to insufficient opportunities to practise the skills pupils learn. In ICT lessons they achieve well from when they enter school to when they leave. GCSE results are well above the average attained by schools deemed to be similar and excellent in the context of problems that have been faced by this school.

18. Past staffing difficulties in French have contributed to pupils in years 7 and 8 having better standards of work than those in Year 9. In Years 7 and 8 standards are broadly average and pupils achieve well. Unsatisfactory achievement of pupils from Year 9 upwards led to GCSE results below those of comparable schools in 2000. However, there is a steady improvement in results and predictions are significantly better than past performance. Stability in staffing should allow results to continue to improve.

19. No judgement on pupils' standards in music can be made, as it is not taught. Pupils' achievements in the subject obviously come to an abrupt halt when they leave primary school, unless parents can afford private tuition. This is unsatisfactory and several parents indicated their concern.

20. In physical education, few pupils in Year 9 are performing to national expectations but there is some improvement in Years 7 and 8. Standards at the end of Year 11 are average and the recent introduction of GCSE has helped to raise standards.

21. In religious education, pupils achieve well, considering their prior attainment, by the end of Year 9 and Year 11 but the standards of their work is below the average set by the Kent Agreed Syllabus. Poor writing skills hinder their progress in lessons.

22. Pupils make good progress in business education lessons and achieve very well by the end of Year 11. Their attainment is well above average compared to all schools.

### ***Pupils with special educational needs***

23. In summer 2000 nearly all pupils achieved at least a pass grade in English, mathematics and science, with a high proportion gaining 5 passes overall. Given the high number of pupils with special educational needs in the school this represents good achievement. A few pupils on the special educational needs register with low attainment on entry to the school did very well gaining 5 or more A\*-C grades.

24. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. Their progress is particularly good when teachers' planning takes into account these pupils specific learning needs. A good example was seen in a Year 7 history lesson, where structured worksheets helped all pupils in the class, but particularly those with reading and writing difficulties, to successfully attempt an assessment activity, which included an extended writing task. Pupils also achieve well when learning support assistants are working with them in the classroom. The learning support assistants help them to understand and read the work set, to maintain their concentration and to complete the activity. Pupils with special educational needs can also achieve well when learning support assistants are not present. However when teachers do not use appropriate teaching strategies, such as making sure all pupils can read the worksheet, pupils are not able to show what they know and can do. The school now takes full advantage of opportunities for pupils to receive support in their Key Stage 3 tests and GCSE examinations (other than English), with reading and writing. This makes sure pupils' difficulties in reading and writing do not stop them from performing well in tests. During the inspection, instances were observed of pupils demonstrating much better understanding of a topic in discussion than in their written work.

### ***The Sixth Form***

25. Though the sixth form is very small and, in 2000, only a one-year vocational course in business was offered, the outcomes were well above national average expectations. 20 students commenced the course and 18 succeeded. 8 students gained either merit or distinction grades. The school's analysis also shows that 16 students did well compared to expectations, and 7 very well. The sixth form is achieving a range of outcomes that are well above national expectations. Results, completion rates and value-added analysis all show this very strongly. Students are offered an effective route for progression into either further education, or employment. During the inspection period all Year 12 students were on work experience placements and no teaching was observed. The school is keen to build a lively and varied sixth form. Entry to the sixth form is flexible, being characterised by a lack of stringent entry requirements. Many students commence their vocational courses with modest levels of prior attainment. Samples of work seen during the inspection indicated that most students are making good progress. Module results already published are encouraging and the school is placing emphasis on improving key skills. All students are developing their numeracy skills and the progress they are making in literacy and the use of ICT is good. All students are confident users of computers and they are using word processors confidently and their work shows the relevant application of other tools such as spreadsheets and graphics. Assessment procedures also contribute to the students' progress. The procedures adopted are detailed, but easily understood and sixth form students interviewed during the inspection confirmed that they understood them and that they knew what they had to do in order to improve their grades.

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

26. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs, enjoy school and want to learn. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Pupils show good attitudes towards their work and school life. They are interested and keen to participate in what the school has to offer. Pupils make good

efforts and respond well individually and in groups. They listen carefully, concentrate well and try hard. There is, however, a small group of pupils who do not feel positive about learning and their presence in class sometimes causes disruption and loss of concentration for the rest. There is also a minority of pupils who are insufficiently challenged in lessons and for whom work is undemanding. The pace and depth of lessons is, on rare occasions, too slow and, as a result, pupils become bored or show a passive, switched off response. Where lessons are delivered at a cracking pace, pupils of all abilities are very responsive and eager to learn. Pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated into school life and, as with other pupils, respond well to the praise and encouragement they receive.

27. The behaviour of pupils in school has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Virtually all pupils in the classroom and around the school are polite, courteous, proud of the school and well behaved. Behaviour in most lessons is good although this is not the case in art where pupils have had many teachers whilst their permanent teacher is on leave. The number of fixed term and permanent exclusions, which were for justifiable reasons, has reduced over the last three years to an acceptable level. No bullying of pupils was observed, nor were signs of racism, and pupils were confident that should they have concerns staff would sort problems out quickly and fairly. Most pupils respond well to rebukes from staff and are co-operative. Parents also consider behaviour to have improved though they still have concerns when teachers are 'supply' rather than permanent and about the behaviour of a minority of pupils, generally in Years 10 and 11. The inspection team agrees that a few pupils can misbehave if the teacher is not well known to them. However, this is not always the case and the behaviour of pupils in Years 10 and 11 is good overall.

28. It is clear that most staff and pupils like and respect each other. This contributes positively towards pupils' personal development. Pupils are taught to respect and value each other. For example, pupils in Year 7 have well thought out personal and social education lessons where, amongst other areas, the principles of taking responsibility for their own actions and their impact on others is taught. The Youth Action Group and the Friendship group offer pupils the chance to show initiative and contribute to the life of the school and local community. Year 11 pupils, including prefects, keep an eye out for younger pupils. This encourages interaction and understanding across the years.

29. Attendance has risen over the last three years to 92 per cent and unauthorised absence reduced. Both figures are now broadly in line with national averages and are an improvement since the last inspection. However, during the first three days of the inspection the attendance level was disappointingly around 90 per cent with pupils' unauthorised absence considerably higher than the national average. Illness contributed to the rise in the number of authorised absences. Many pupils take holidays in term time, and while permission is given for this, these absences inevitably mean that they miss lessons and, therefore, may fall behind their contemporaries.

30. During the inspection pupils with special educational needs were generally observed to respond well to their teachers, to take an interest in their work and to want to improve. They appreciate the support of their teachers and particularly that of the learning support assistants, with whom they form good relationships. The confidence that the pupils gain from the learning support assistants helps them to achieve well. Pupils are very supportive of each other and are very ready to congratulate the efforts of their friends who sometimes find learning more difficult, such as when they read out loud to the class. Attendance in some of the lower ability groups during the inspection was very low. Over time attendance can be inconsistent. This stops pupils making the best possible progress.



## HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

### How well are pupils or students taught.

31. Teaching is good in Years 7 to 11 and very good in the sixth form. The sixth form judgment was made on the basis of the students' work seen and the results that they attain, as students were on work experience at the time of the inspection. 103 lessons were observed. 99 were satisfactory or better, 63 good or better, 22 were very good and 1 was excellent. 4 lessons were unsatisfactory, all were taught by temporary teachers. Teaching is better than at the time of the last inspection when it was satisfactory overall and good in the sixth form.

32. There is a mixture of relatively new permanent appointments and established teachers in the school. All these teachers have many strengths. They teach at least satisfactorily and often better than that. Temporary and supply teachers sometimes have more difficulty in engaging classes as they have had little time to establish a rapport with pupils. This is important in this school as pupils respond very well to good teaching, sometimes attaining at least average standards of work in the process. Pupils respect teachers who 'do the job'. They work hard for them, work at a good pace and make considerable personal efforts to get their work right.

33. Overall, teachers' knowledge and understanding, planning of lessons, expectations of pupils, effectiveness, and use of resources are all good. Their management of pupils is very good, though with reservations when temporary teachers are sometimes involved. Teaching of basic skills, particularly literacy, numeracy and the use of computers is variable. Literacy and numeracy are discussed fully in paragraphs that follow. The use of computers by teachers to support their teaching, or learning by pupils, is essentially a resource issue. There is one good, networked, room almost always in use for ICT lessons, so infrequently available for other teachers. Pupils work in ICT lessons could link more frequently to the work they do elsewhere. Another ICT room contains machines too old for effective use by most subjects. Teachers of business education make very effective use of them and pupils respond by producing work of a good standard. Where there are some good machines elsewhere in the school, teachers often do make effective use of them to support pupils learning. For example, the use of computers is a contributory factor to good standards of work in history, Key Stage 3 geography, and design and technology. French teachers are also making good inroads into using ICT to motivate pupils through using effective software and through establishing links with French speaking schools in other countries. This is a very important strategy to help pupils acquire relevant skills, knowledge and understanding, as their standards in French have historically been poor.

34. Teachers' assessment of pupils' work, including marking, is satisfactory overall. Teachers in subjects that do well have better practise, are more rigorous, involve pupils more in the process and follow up advice they have given to pupils. Pupils in their lessons generally have a better understanding of how well they have done and so are better prepared to move forwards. Other teachers sometimes mark work irregularly, make few comments about how pupils might improve, or fail to follow up advice given, such as 'finish this' or 'correct these words'. Teachers' assessment practise is reflected in the quality of information to parents about how well their children are progressing. This information has not been satisfactory and annual academic reports to parents have been bland. Parents were critical of it. Just prior to the inspection a new system was introduced that appears to be better. The use of homework by teachers to support pupils' learning shows a similar picture and is variable across the school and within subjects. Consequently pupils sometimes have a lot, sometimes too little. Homework was criticised by parents. To some extent, homework is also a resource issue as effective homework does need access to resources, probably books and increasingly computers. Financial constraints have limited the amount of spending on both.

35. Teaching in English is good. Planning of lessons is good. The best lessons involve pupils a lot and often contain group work. Marking is well done but giving pupils 'next step targets' is inconsistent. Teaching in mathematics is good. Teachers have high expectations, time is not wasted and pupils learn well. Teachers have a good knowledge of the National Numeracy strategy. In the best lessons homework is set in plenty of time to avoid a last minute scramble at the end. Marking is not consistently done and some pupils' work remains unchecked. Teaching in science is satisfactory. The best lessons are well structured and pupils are clear about what to do. Numeracy and literacy skills are focussed upon. In unsatisfactory lessons pupils are unclear about what to do and cannot read the worksheets. Sometimes the timing is out and there is a rush at the end of the lesson to make up for time wasted earlier.

36. Teaching in art and design was unsatisfactory. The full time teacher was not present and had been on leave for some time.

37. Teaching of design and technology is very good. The pace is fast and there is a very good structure to lessons. Pupils are assessed comprehensively and both they and teachers know exactly what they can and cannot do, what they need to do and how they are progressing. Teachers use ICT well.

38. Teaching of geography is good in Key stage 3 and satisfactory in Key stage 4. The best lessons have good management of pupils and use resources well to motivate them. Homework booklets in Key Stage 3 are good and are encouraging pupils to undertake regular independent work. There is regular and effective marking so pupils know what they must do to improve. In less successful lessons teachers' management of some disruptive boys needs honing. Teaching of history is very good and reflects a passion for the subject. There is very good preparation and high expectations. Pupils are often engaged in independent learning and produce a wealth of work. Teachers show no compromise, all pupils are engaged and required to produce work of a good standard.

39. Teaching of ICT is good. Lessons are well planned and pupils are both taught as a class group and well supported as individuals when on computers. Better ICT resources would help the teacher do both jobs, for example a simple large monitor mounted on the wall and software to allow her to 'take over' individual screens. Good use is made of time before, after and during the lunch break for pupils to do computer related 'homework' and this effectively consolidates their progress.

40. Teaching of modern languages is good. It is well planned with plenty of activities to stimulate and interest pupils. There are good relations with pupils and homework is set and marked. Teaching of physical education is good. Lessons are well planned and teachers provide good role models. Teachers need to support pupils' literacy more in GCSE work. Teaching of religious education is good. There is a good pace to lessons, interesting activities and up to date marking. Pupils take a pride in their work. Their need to acquire literacy skills is well supported. Teaching of vocational subjects, primarily business education, is very good. There is very good planning and very high expectations that really challenges pupils. They rise to it and do extremely well. The tutor of the NVQ building option is not a teacher at the school but a lesson was seen. It was really good and pupils behaved and worked impeccably.

### ***Literacy***

41. Specialist literacy support lessons, observed in Year 7, included good teaching of word recognition, phonics and spellings. All history lessons observed included good teaching of literacy skills and teachers of religious education lessons carry out the school's literacy policy effectively. Drama teachers emphasise the acquisition of new words by pupils. Business education teachers in Year 11

well emphasise basic skills, like the correct spelling of 'there' and 'their' and introduce specialist vocabulary like 'internal and external constraints' on an organisation. In Year 11 geography work, pupils' literacy skills, particularly spelling, are weak. However, good teaching of literacy skills was observed in Key Stage 3 geography classes, for example emphasis on reading round the class in Year 7 and imaginative writing about a visit to a rainforest by Year 9 pupils. In the sixth form, students' GNVQ assignments in Business and in Leisure and Tourism show that teachers insist that they write informatively and extensively. The policies of introducing 10 key words for any new topic has been adopted by most teachers, although in some subjects the key words on display are not drawn to the attention of the pupils. Most subjects in the school have adopted the practice of correcting up to six spelling errors in any piece of writing, but not all teachers insist that pupils write corrections. Very poor spelling is not picked up adequately in IC T and 'spell checkers' are not used sufficiently to help pupils recognise their mistakes. For the school to build on the good progress so far, it is important that all subject teachers demonstrate to pupils the value that the school attributes to literacy skills as part of their learning.

### ***Numeracy***

42. Numerical skills are well taught in the mathematics department. In addition some good examples of teaching numeracy skills were seen in a number of subject areas during the inspection. In design technology teachers integrate numerical skills into the mainstream work. Science teachers offer good opportunities for the pupils to make sense of information presented in numerical and graphical forms. Building NVQ pupils are shown by their tutor how to use Pythagoras' theorem to make a right angle when building a wall. Geography teachers provide opportunities for pupils to develop skills and understanding of number in relation to place and time. For example, pupils study time zones and the 24 hour clock, gaining understanding of changing time around the world. In addition, compass direction, grid references, scale and distance are all ideas that are well covered.

### ***Teaching of pupils with special educational needs***

43. Pupils with learning or behaviour difficulties learn best when the teaching is well structured. Tasks are clearly explained, worksheets are written in language that they understand and any supporting staff well informed in advance of the work to be done. In English and mathematics setting arrangements well support pupils, enabling work to be set at appropriate levels of difficulty. Particularly good teaching was seen in Year 8 English where the teacher and the learning support assistant worked effectively together to support pupils' work on poems. Where the teacher does not clearly explain what is to take place, for example relying on pupils to be able to follow a worksheet instead of explaining it clearly step by step, then pupils very quickly lose interest. This leads to unsatisfactory behaviour and very little learning takes place as observed in a Year 8 science lesson. Learning support assistants are appropriately deployed and support pupils with special educational needs well in the classroom. They are particularly effective in helping pupils to understand fully the tasks set and to maintain their concentration. Pupils are able to express what they know and understand not only in words but in the work they produce, for example pupils in Year 9 geography being able to complete successfully a mapping exercise. This gives them a real sense of achievement. When pupils are withdrawn for work in small groups, with either specialist tutors or learning support assistants, the small group/one to one sessions are effective in helping pupils to overcome their learning difficulties and to improve their skills. These are primarily for reading, writing, and spelling, English and mathematics. Some teachers take note of the information in the pupils' individual education plans. Where they use these for planning and to set pupils their own targets, such as in religious education, these pupils make good progress, even where there is no in class support. Good liaison between the teacher and the learning support assistant in geography results in worksheets that are appropriate for pupils' reading levels.

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

44. The school is unable to provide an appropriate statutory curriculum to its pupils in Years 7 to 11. This is because it has suffered staffing problems and music is not taught as part of the statutory curriculum. Despite this problem, attempts have been made to improve the curriculum since the last OFSTED report. The curriculum offered to pupils in years 7, 8 and 9, in terms of the quality and range of learning opportunities provided, is satisfactory. For pupils in years 10 and 11, the quality and range of learning opportunities are good, as they are in the sixth form where a number of enhancements have been made.

45. With the exception of music, pupils in years 7, 8 and 9 receive their full entitlement to the National Curriculum, including a suitable provision for the teaching of religious education. The curriculum in Year 7 has been enhanced by the introduction of a key skills course with the intention of improving pupils' abilities in literacy, numeracy and ICT. Emphasis is also placed on presentation skills. In the first three years, all pupils also follow a programme in personal and social development. This course is satisfactorily planned and makes adequate provision for health and sex education and covers other relevant social issues such as drugs abuse. In Year 7 this programme is covered in form time, but in Years 8 and 9 it forms part of the taught curriculum and the course is delivered by subject specialists. Though the programme is suitably planned and comprehensive, the provision for careers education and guidance is delayed until Year 9. In many other schools careers education and guidance is introduced far earlier.

46. For a comparatively small establishment working within the constraints of tight staffing, the school has succeeded in offering a good and broad curriculum to its examination pupils in years 10 and 11. Though music does not feature, all other National Curriculum subjects are covered. The design and technology department is able to offer the choice of four GCSE options. This includes a highly successful course in child development. A GCSE option in physical education has been introduced since the last inspection and is already making a good contribution to the attainment of boys in particular. Other enhancements include a GNVQ option in ICT in Year 10, GCSE business studies and a pre-National Vocational Level 1 course in building craft occupations. This praiseworthy development enhances the school's work related curriculum. The course covers the skills of bricklaying, carpentry, plastering and painting and decorating and is promoted by the Construction Industry Training Board and offered via the adult education facility based on the school's site. This course, and the other enhancements made to the curriculum in years 10 and 11, succeed in offering pupils a good level of choice and promote various pathways that pupils can follow beyond the compulsory stage of their education.

47. For pupils in Years 10 and 11 adequate provision is made for the teaching of religious education and personal and social development. Sex and health education is suitably covered, as is careers education and guidance. Pupils in Year 10 undertake a two-week work placement. Pupils are offered a suitable number of GCSE subjects to study and the introduction of a GNVQ option in Year 10 has increased the number of subjects available. One problem recently emerging, however, is the timetable becoming cramped. This is most marked in the provision of science. Candidates opting to study the double science award option at GCSE receive significantly less teaching time than that recommended. The range of GCSE choices receive some criticism from pupils and their parents. French is the only modern foreign language offered. This restriction is partly because of staff constraints and the school's management is aware that there is a demand for more choice.

48. The previous inspection report was critical of the scope of the post 16 curriculum. The school's sixth form is very small and this severely impedes expansion of the curriculum. However,

given the constraints, the school has succeeded in achieving some growth and pupils opting to stay on to Year 12 are offered quite an enterprising timetable. Two, one-year, vocational courses are offered. In addition, all students follow a course in physical education, religious education, and personal and social education and they attend whole school assemblies. Opportunities for gaining extra qualifications beyond their vocational studies have also been improved. Students are involved with the Young Enterprise award scheme. All students gain accreditation in first aid. Good provision is also made for key skills with all students given opportunities to improve their standards in English, mathematics and ICT. Some, who already have good GCSE results in English and/or mathematics, opt to undertake community service instead of physical education. During the inspection week, all Year 12 students were undertaking work experience placements. Those visited acknowledged the worth of their placements. The sixth form curriculum has been broadened since the previous inspection and it now offers a suitable range of learning opportunities. Thought is being given to how these opportunities might be developed further.

49. Though the curriculum has been enhanced, some problems still remain. Pupils and their parents are critical of the range of extra-curricula activities on offer. Though some competitive sport is played, many pupils would like to see more opportunities. Some sixth formers, in particular, lamented the lack of opportunity to play soccer and rugby. Some departments run clubs and after school activities, but such provision is not fully embedded in the daily life of the school. Theatre visits, drama activities and musical events are infrequent and the overall provision for the expressive arts needs better planning. The staff shortages in music have not helped and, though some musical events have been arranged in association with the Kent Music School, there is poor provision to foster pupils' musical skills through the use of visiting instrumental tuition. Visits to places of local interest and abroad are rare, though the French department is partially beginning to address this problem.

50. A recent, but strong initiative, has been to develop partnerships with local businesses. This is already bringing success by helping to enhance the school's reputation in the local area. A number of companies now work in association with the school. A range of businesses sponsors a very good half-termly newsletter and some firms are involved in the delivery of the curriculum. For example, a local company finances the first aid course offered to sixth formers and other firms have helped in the provision of vocational courses. The school has good plans to foster these partnerships so that further improvements to the curriculum can be secured.

51. The overall provision made for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is satisfactory, though it is not planned and co-ordinated at a whole school level. The piecemeal approach, which varies across departments, means that while the provision for social and cultural development is good and for moral development is satisfactory, provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory. The school does not record what is done and the senior management team is unaware of where good practice occurs in departments.

52. Though all pupils, including sixth formers, attend religious education lessons and assemblies, there are too few opportunities in the curriculum for pupils to reflect and develop a sense of curiosity. Religious education lessons and assemblies offer some opportunity for reflection, but provision elsewhere is rare. Year 9 history pupils are encouraged to reflect on past events and their detailed study of the role played by soldiers from the British Empire during the Second World War stimulates interest. Elsewhere in observed lessons, and in departmental schemes of work, few other examples of spiritual development were detected. The paucity of provision in the expressive arts further enforces the judgement that spiritual provision is unsatisfactory.

53. Satisfactory provision is made for moral development and the improvement in pupils' behaviour since the last inspection indicates that various school policies are having an impact. A

stronger moral code now exists within the school and the personal and social development programme has been successful in reinforcing attitudes about acceptable behaviour. A growing number of pupils are now willing to take responsibility for their own actions and they give thought to how their actions might impact on others. Within lessons there was little evidence of moral issues being given prominence across the curriculum with any consistency, though a few good examples were seen. For example in a Year 8 drama lesson moral issues relating to bullying were considered and in a Year 11 science lesson environmental pollution was discussed and pupils had to reflect on the cost to society of increased motor vehicle use.

54. Good provision is made for social development and some interesting schemes to promote social responsibility exist. Pupils have some opportunities to seek responsibility via the prefect and librarian systems. In addition the school is working with a number of outside agencies such as the Kent Education Business Partnership and the Snodland Town Council to promote responsibility. In years 10 and 11 some disaffected youngsters are working in partnership with business mentors. This scheme is designed to encourage the pupils to take more responsibility for their actions. Some pleasing outcomes from this initiative can be highlighted. In conjunction with another agency, a 'friends group' has been established. Pupils are trained to act as counsellors and other pupils can approach them to discuss issues of concern such as bullying. This scheme has met with success as incidents of bullying have been reduced and many pupils referred to how much the school has improved since the previous inspection. Pupils are also working in association with the town council to improve the environment. This has been successful in reducing litter. Pupils also work on other community schemes such as cleaning the banks of the River Medway. The school's emphasis on collaborative partnerships with the local community is succeeding in enhancing the social development of many pupils. It is also involving pupils in projects that they enjoy.

55. Cultural opportunities are also being fostered. Though few opportunities to develop cultural awareness through expressive arts exist, other mechanisms are being developed. The school has an international policy and as part of this policy links are being forged with Brazil. The school's international links co-ordinator is also using e-mail to forge links with schools in a variety of countries including Germany, Japan and South Korea. Some departments are likewise endeavouring to stimulate cultural awareness. Geography and history both make valid contributions. The French department will be visiting France in July and they plan to establish a video-conference link with a Moroccan school. In physical education, cultural awareness is fostered by the study of dance in different cultures. Preparation for life in a multi-cultural society is not an enforced aspect of the curriculum but does happen through very good experiences, due to excellent role models provided by staff.

56. The school needs to adopt a more consistent approach to its provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and some planning and recording of provision is needed. At present provision appears ad hoc, though some successful ventures can be identified.

### ***Learning opportunities for pupils with special educational needs***

57. Arrangements for meeting the needs of pupils with special educational needs are satisfactory. Statutory requirements are met for those with a statement of educational need and the identified support is provided. The deployment of the learning support assistants is good and is targeted where it is required. Withdrawal work is appropriate and does not significantly affect pupils' learning in other subjects. Short intensive programmes to improve the reading, writing and spelling skills of the youngest pupils in years 7 and 8 are well targeted. Other withdrawal work, in English and mathematics, is matched to the activities being undertaken by the pupils' classmates. Some subjects, such as ICT, physical education and religious education, receive little or no support. In physical education the

department provides its own much needed additional support for pupils taking the GCSE sports studies course. These pupils are particularly weak in producing written work, which is 40% of the course.

58. The targets set in the individual education plans for pupils on the special educational needs register are not yet sufficiently targeted at pupils' learning needs. They are too broad, such as 'to improve reading skills', without setting out to what level from where. They too often cover behaviour and concentration in lessons rather than learning. Whilst all teachers receive copies of these for the pupils they teach, very little evidence was seen of subject teachers using these to set learning targets for the pupils in their subject. Though pupils make good progress overall, their progress could be better still if targets were improved and used.

59. The school has good links with the local school for pupils with more severe learning difficulties. Pupils from this school join Holmesdale pupils for physical educational and design and technology activities. This is part of a three-year plan that is benefiting pupils from both schools, in particular developing an understanding and awareness of pupils with disabilities.

### ***Literacy***

60. Since the last inspection the school has taken some effective steps to raise the levels of pupils' literacy. A literacy policy exists and a literacy coordinator has been in post for two years. The school has participated in two literacy summer schools that have led to good links with some feeder schools. More links would be beneficial, especially for English teachers to experience Literacy Hour, to develop liaison and possibly a "Bridging Project" to complement the school's "Moving Up" programme. Not all endeavours have proved successful, for example the working party on literacy was disbanded and effort channelled through meetings of heads of departments. Also the "Catch -Up" programme, for pupils entering the school with low levels of skills in English, was discontinued. The "Skills Programme" which was originally introduced for Years 7 and 8, currently provides all pupils in Year 7 lessons in literacy, in reading, in the presentation of work and in numeracy. The school should now introduce systems for retesting pupils to determine how much pupils have achieved as a result of this programme and to identify targets for further progress.

### ***Numeracy***

61. Most departments have a formal policy for the teaching of number and all have been given guidance on the teaching of number skills following a whole school audit of the use of number across the curriculum. Each term all departments are given a specific area of numerical skill upon which to focus. Year 7 pupils follow a carousel of basic skills lessons including numeracy skills and motor skills such as the accurate use of a compass for drawing circles and measuring. Provision for teaching numerical skills is, therefore, good.

### ***Curriculum in the Sixth Form***

62. A good post 16 curriculum is offered. The previous OFSTED report criticised the breadth of the sixth form curriculum. Since this report was published, the school has expanded the range and the quality of the curriculum, even though the sixth form remains small. Two one-year vocational courses are now offered. These cover business and leisure and tourism. All students follow key skills courses in literacy, numeracy and ICT. Physical education and religious education are also provided and students attend whole school assemblies twice weekly. A well-planned work experience programme exists and the students praised the quality of the careers guidance offered. The curriculum also offers opportunities to gain additional accreditation. Young Enterprise is flourishing and the students are running a successful horticultural enterprise. A sponsorship arrangement has been negotiated with a

local firm enabling students to gain certificates in first aid that are valid in work place situations for three years. The smallness of the sixth form does restrict certain opportunities. Some students lamented the lack of competitive sport and choice is constrained, but within the parameters that exist, a thoughtful curriculum has been established. Substantial improvements have been made since the last inspection and the sixth form offers a small, but committed, cohort of students good opportunities to secure further accreditation and prospects to progress to the next stage of their education.

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

63. As at the last inspection, the school provides satisfactory child protection, support, welfare and guidance for its pupils. It is a caring community where teachers know their pupils well and offer help and advice to all pupils, including the large group of those with special educational needs. Pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated into school life and, like most pupils respond well to the praise and encouragement they receive. Good work and maintained effort are rewarded with merits, commendations and, at the end of the year, prizes. Pupils with higher prior attainment, including those who may be gifted or talented, are not always given the chance to show what they can do. There is good access to the ground floor of the school, but not upper levels, for those with physical disabilities.

64. The school provides good educational and personal support and guidance for its pupils. Parents are generally supportive of the school and believe that it has a growing positive influence on their children's values and attitudes towards learning. There are many opportunities for pupils to contribute to the life of the school and the visits undertaken by pupils as part of the curriculum contribute well to their personal development. The programme for the personal, social and health education of pupils throughout the school, which was started last autumn, is soundly based and covers all required areas, including citizenship. Lessons are at least satisfactorily taught and managed and pupils respond well to them. Mentoring of pupils in Years 10 and 11, to improve their attitudes to work or help them do better in examinations is well organised and is done by both adults within the school and a good number of adults introduced through the Education Business Partnership. These adults are from industry and work well with pupils. Another initiative that helps pupils learn how to meet people, write letters and articles and hold meetings is the Youth Action Award. This works very successfully with pupils and is largely responsible for the almost litter free environment within and around the school buildings.

65. The emotional and behavioural needs of pupils with special educational needs are well known by the special educational needs staff. Learning support assistants build up good relationships with the pupils they work with. They clearly help them to gain confidence to undertake the work set, even when it initially appears difficult. They encourage pupils to participate in lessons by answering the teacher's questions and asking their own questions when they do not understand. Good behaviour and the completion of work are praised. This supports well the progress they make in lessons.

66. Health and safety and child protection measures are managed satisfactorily. Staff are well trained and aware of how to respond when there are concerns. Although there is no written record of risk assessments or fire drills having taken place, these have been carried out. The school has been informed of some outstanding health and safety issues.

67. The procedures for monitoring academic performance are satisfactory. Teachers know from the start of Year 7 what the attainment of each pupil is from their primary school records and from tests in this school. End of Year 9 test results provide some information later on. As a result, targets have recently been set for pupils to aim towards in all subjects. The targets are sometimes too imprecise and not adequate to closely direct teaching and learning so that each pupil progresses as fast as is appropriate. The targets are shared with parents and this is a very positive move that should help to raise standards further. Teachers have not identified pupils with higher abilities, or who may be



gifted and talented, well enough and provision for them is generally unsatisfactory. Teachers' marking of work varies in its usefulness to pupils.

68. Homework, that helps pupils learn, is part of school requirements but is not set altogether consistently in every subject. A high proportion of parents, who responded to the questionnaire or attended the meeting, complained about inadequate homework and failure to 'chase up' pupils who did not do it. Some Year 7 pupils said that they did not always have sufficient mathematics homework.

69. The information that is gathered from assessment about the attainment of pupils is not yet used sufficiently to help plan the curriculum. Teachers are starting to, but not yet making full use of assessment data to plan future lessons and activities within lessons for pupils of differing prior attainment.

70. Information on pupils' behaviour and the completion of work is sound. Learning support assistants systematically and regularly complete records about pupils with special educational needs. However, the records do not sufficiently focus on what pupils know, understand, and can do in lessons. As a result pupils are not set clear short term targets related to improving their reading, writing or number skills such as the quick recall of their 3 and 4 times tables. The annual reviews for pupils with a statement of need are clear and informative, but need to be used more effectively in setting targets in pupils' individual education plans. Reading and spelling ages are undertaken on a yearly basis, but the information needs to be used more effectively to monitor how well all pupils with special educational needs are progressing over time and not just those with a statement of special educational need.

71. The monitoring and promotion of pupils' behaviour is good. Parents support the school's firm stand on eliminating poor behaviour and believe it is now better than in recent years though they do say a significant minority of pupils still causes problems. Teachers almost always react firmly and consistently to poor behaviour. Incidents of misbehaviour, including racist insults, are logged, pupils put 'on report' and action taken promptly. The behaviour support service works with a small group of pupils and this is both effective in improving the attitudes of these pupils and in making teachers aware of new ways of dealing with poor behaviour. Pupils are confident that any bullying will be dealt with promptly and effectively.

72. The monitoring of pupils' attendance is unsatisfactory. Parents receive a phone call home on the first day of absence and subsequent follow up letters about absence if this is required. These measures have improved attendance levels over the last three years. However, the school site is large and class registers are not always taken nor class absence during the day followed up quickly enough. This allows reluctant pupils to dawdle between lessons or disappear off site. The school currently has a temporary educational welfare officer and better provision is needed if standards are to be maintained or improved.

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

73. Most parents and carers, who replied to the questionnaire, think that their children are happy at school and that Holmesdale is a greatly improved school. It has recovered pupil numbers in the last two years as it is becoming more popular with parents and is currently over subscribed for Year 7 in 2001.

74. The school has made good efforts in its links with parents. Both they and the local community receive excellent regular newsletters informing them about achievements and events at school. At the recent academic review day over 90 per cent of parents met teachers to discuss their child's progress. This is planned to occur twice a year and should meet the concerns raised by about one fifth of

parents about inadequate annual reports. Many parents have returned signed Home School Agreements that relate to pupils attitudes and behaviour.

75. The prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents are clearly written and informative. Written reports cover all subjects but do not include clear information about the progress pupils have made over the year, nor do they include clear targets for improvement which would help them to move forward. They have in part been super ceded by the good information given to parents at the academic review meeting.

76. There is insufficient involvement of parents in supporting the school at present, for example there is no Parents' Teachers' Association, but the contribution of parents to their children's learning at home is satisfactory. Parents are aware of the need for them to sign the homework section of the student planner that each pupil carries and many do so.

77. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are kept suitably informed of their children's targets through their children's planners, parents' meetings and phone calls. Learning support staff attend parents' meetings. The parents of pupils with a statement of educational need are fully included in the annual review process, having the opportunity to contribute their views on their child's progress, before the meeting, through a simple form.

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

78. The headteacher gives very good leadership and the management of the school is good overall. Very effective leadership has led to significant improvements in standards in GCSE results, pupils' behaviour and the standing of the school in the community in the two years since the last inspection. Very good planning means the school has managed to work around its very large budget deficit, inherited from previous mismanagement of finances. There is a clear strategic plan that sets out goals for the future and stages on the way. There are also alternative strategies in place to move the school forwards if it is not successful in some of the national initiatives it is bidding for. The headteacher has huge confidence in his school, teachers, other staff and pupils, both on the basis of the very good improvement over the last two years and in his vision for much more improvement in the near future.

79. The school is small and teachers have to take on multiple roles. Sometimes teachers are not available and supply or temporary staff are incorporated into the team. The headteacher has done his best to work to peoples strengths and to take advantage of opportunities that arise, for example employing an unqualified teacher of modern languages with French as his native language and post-graduate qualifications in ICT. Some staff take on extra duties without extra pay, for example, the head of design and technology also co-ordinates ICT. As pupil numbers increase to the planned capacity of the school, these extra duties will become more onerous. The deputy headteacher, appointed in September, supports the headteacher very well. The deputy has picked up two of the outstanding weaknesses, using assessment information to help pupils do better and reporting children's progress to their parents, and significant success in these areas was evident just before the inspection.

80. Management of subjects varies from satisfactory to very good and reflects pupils' standards achieved. It is very good in design and technology, business education and history. Some heads of department are relatively new and are beginning to have a significantly positive impact, for example in geography and in mathematics. Leadership in science is satisfactory and suffers from changes in teaching staff that cause discontinuity. The small size of the school means some subjects, like art and music only have one teacher allocated to them. This has meant pupils have had a poor experience of art since the teacher went on leave and no experience of National Curriculum music, or any substantial music, for some years as a music teacher has not been appointed. The headteacher recognises these

problems and has intervened in art. Plans are in place to include music from next September but alternative approaches have not been considered enough.

81. The school has clear aims and values linked to improving standards of work, behaviour and the quality of life in the school. Success is shared through assemblies and newsletters and both staff and pupils are keen to do well. All worked hard to make this inspection have a successful outcome. Outside agencies are used to add value to the work of pupils and celebrate their achievements, for example the Youth Action Awards, The Mayor's Cup and Smurfit Townsend Hook, who organise and sponsor the first aid course. Pupils treat their school with care and are welcoming to visitors.

82. The governing body is very effective in fulfilling its statutory duties and in evaluating the work of the school. School statutory targets have been agreed with the headteacher. The procedures for appraising the headteacher are in place. The governing body contains people who are very knowledgeable about schools, finance and the local community. Several local industries are represented and the chair is both very effective in supporting the school and genuinely dedicated to its future improvement. There are very good relationships between the governing body and the senior managers of the school. Governors are also 'attached' to subject areas and meet with teachers regularly. They are well informed about what goes on. They take a very keen interest in planning and in the financial implications of proposed developments. They have no wish to make the same mistakes that others made some years ago. They have been instrumental in ensuring that the school gets a good deal from a forthcoming land sale and that the huge debt will be written off, freeing the school to improve faster. The governors recognise their failure to provide music and have it on their agenda. They have been instrumental in supporting a musical activity in Year 7.

83. The monitoring, evaluation and development of teaching is satisfactory. Teaching has certainly improved since the last inspection with commensurate rise in the standards of pupils' work. Much of this has come about through staff changes and both lucky and skilful appointments. Some improvement is certainly down to the 'success' ethos fostered by the headteacher and to formal and informal lesson observations by heads of department and senior staff. The school acquired Investors in People status and used its' framework to evaluate and develop staff. This is now being superseded, to some extent, by statutory performance management. Professional review objectives are in place but these are not yet linked to pupil progress. This should follow around Easter 2001. Weak teachers are certainly recognised by the school. They are generally supply teachers and are moved on if possible and supported when necessary. This has caused problems over the last few months in art. There is some very good teaching that includes an emphasis on raising pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. However, this very good practice is not adopted by all teachers and, consequently, pupils' standards in these areas remain low. Very effective monitoring of teaching would help to address this. Too few staff having to do too many jobs makes it a little difficult but there are fewer staff to monitor too.

84. Learning support assistants are well integrated into teachers' work. They are currently employed by the local education authority, but still enjoy professional development opportunities, such as ICT training. The induction of teachers new to the school needs updating particularly when changes are relatively frequent and time is not easy to set aside, as in science. Students felt they are generally well supported but there is no built in time for them with subject mentors. The school certainly has the potential to be an effective provider of teacher training. Some departments are very successful and, though pupils may be challenging to the inexperienced, they certainly respond very well to good teaching. The school also has three unqualified teachers. One has been there many years and is very successful, one is training 'on the job' and one is younger but adding personal expertise to the classroom.

85. Two years ago the headteacher, with staff and governors, set out a clear agenda to raise pupils' GCSE results. These were very poor and there was an immediate need to improve them for pupils in Year 11, Year 10 and then subsequent years. Targets were set and well surpassed. Consequently the school became 27<sup>th</sup> in the list of the top 100 most improved schools in the country. The actions taken cannot be disputed and they were very successful. Longer-term strategies are based on increasing knowledge of the potential of pupils. This is acquired through national test results and school based tests, that use well tried and tested criteria to judge pupils' likely future performance. From this data pupils are placed in classes, where staffing permits, that cater for their needs a little better than if they were all mixed up and specialist support is better targeted. As yet, teachers are not sufficiently used to using data to monitor the progress that individual pupils make and the ICT systems in place are not sophisticated enough to help them do it. Consequently, the use of data to ensure all pupils progress as well as they might, though improving, is not yet satisfactory.

86. Financial planning is very thorough and very careful. The budget has been closely monitored by Kent for some years as a huge deficit was previously allowed to accumulate. Such has been the effectiveness of the present governors' oversight and the work of the bursar that only a 'light touch' is now applied. The sixth form is only small but costs very little to run in addition to the money 'brought in' by the students themselves. Working to a very tight budget could have hampered the school even more, but the bursar provides heads of department with a budget and keeps them well informed of how they are spending it. To their credit they have accepted the situation and work effectively within their small budgets rather than bemoaning the problems. The bursar also monitors specific grants and special budgets and ensures monies are correctly spent. He is also instrumental in pursuing historical billing problems like water and electricity and has saved the school considerable sums of money that have been put to good use in the classrooms. This pursuit of 'best value' extends to the purchase of goods and services whenever possible though there is some pressure to use County recommended suppliers.

87. The school uses new technology, computers, much more effectively than at the time of the last report and the thrust for this has come from the headteacher and the ICT co-ordinator. Networking is gradually moving through the school and, as finances allow, school administration and academic monitoring will become more efficient and even more effective. National Grid for Learning money has been well spent. Interesting international links are being developed through geography and French. The local Education Business Partnership is being instrumental in supporting some of these.

88. There are insufficient teachers as there is no music teacher; art is covered by supply (though this should be remedied by the time this report is published) and science has several temporary teachers. Drama is just covered by an unqualified adult. French and ICT both have unqualified teachers, fortunately very successful ones. The school manages these circumstances very well and appoints when it can. It is a 'chicken and egg' situation. To get teachers it needs to be successful and have the money. To be successful and get the money (effectively pupil numbers) it needs to be seen to be successful. Money will also enable it to employ more technical support staff. There is only one in science and none in design and technology. A shared ICT technician is a boon and enables teachers to focus on using computers with pupils rather than keeping them working.

89. Accommodation is satisfactory. Many old buildings had to be replaced some years ago so there are many good classrooms. Older areas are well cared for but shabby and the science area needs more refurbishment than that planned for. Such refurbishment would help to recruit and retain science teachers and so help raise standards further. Physical education provision is also worn, though the gym floor has had to be replaced due to flooding. There is insufficient dedicated space for computers. Perversely, the accommodation for music is better than in many schools, it just needs a teacher.

90. Resources are unsatisfactory. This is mainly due to insufficient numbers of computers. Most of the good ones are used for dedicated ICT lessons, leaving little opportunity for their use in lessons. There is very efficient use of old computers in business education but such good work deserves better and industry standard software cannot be run on these machines. The library is stocked with adequate books but pupils use them insufficiently, especially to help them read at home. New technology provision in the library does not currently exist but this is about to be rectified.

91. This is an effective school. Leadership and management have brought standards up to where they should have been some years ago and are preparing to take them further. Subjects like design and technology, business education and history show what can be done. The school costs rather more than average, mainly due to the relatively expensive nature of a small school. This is compounded by the fluctuating numbers of pupils in year groups, particularly the small number in Year 9, and the costs of maintaining and heating currently 'spare' rooms. Though academic standards remain, overall, well below average, pupils achieve well and standards are rising quickly. The school gives satisfactory value for money, an improvement in itself from the judgement in the last inspection. The sixth form is also successful and cost effective.

### *Leadership and management of special educational needs*

92. Management and organisation of the work of the special educational needs team are good. The special educational needs co-ordinator was new at the time of the last inspection and has continued to improve the school's work in this area. The learning support team much appreciate her support, systematic procedures, and the opportunities given for improving their skills. However the special educational needs co-ordinator is not a trained teacher of special educational needs and, apart from the visiting tutors, there is no specialist teacher in the department. The co-ordinator lacks the expertise to lead the development of teaching approaches for both class teachers and the learning support assistants. This does not help to develop further the good work of the special educational needs team, particularly in setting better learning targets for pupils. The school recognises this and hopes to have greater flexibility in appointing staff when the money available for supporting special educational needs pupils at stages 3 -5 (national grades) is given to the school from the coming April.

93. The learning resources base is a large room that has well organised work areas. These allow a number of small groups to work together without distracting each other. It provides a pleasant place for pupils to work in, making them feel valued. There are seven computers, which are being used to support pupils' learning. However during the inspection little evidence of their use was observed, although a good range of CD ROMs are available for use. The department is still building up its range of resources following the fires a few years ago, but the range of games and practical activities available is limited.

94. The school appropriately accounts for its spending on pupils with special educational needs, but currently does not put in any extra money than that allocated, because of the budget constraints. The level of current support is above average

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

95. To move the school on, continue to raise the standards of pupils' work and provide more opportunities for them, the governors should:

- (1) Take more rigorous actions to continue raising the standards of pupils' literacy and numeracy by:
  - Ensuring all teachers follow the school policies.
  - Providing more opportunities for pupils to read.
  - Ensuring older pupils benefit from initiatives introduced lower down the school.
  - Considering how new technology might help.  
(Paragraphs 9, 11, 33, 35, 41, 60, 83, 85, 97, 98, 129, 172)
  
- (2) Ensure pupils' entitlement to music is met and involvement with drama is improved by:
  - Employing a music teacher as soon as possible.
  - Providing opportunities for peripatetic music instructors to work with pupils in the school.
  - Encouraging musically talented pupils to set up and manage their own band, orchestra, singing group or club.
  - Encouraging drama activities in Key Stage 4 and school drama productions generally.  
(Paragraphs 19, 44, 80, 105, 173)
  
- (3) Raise pupils' attainment in science by the end of Year 9 by:
  - Seeking to stabilise staffing as quickly as possible.
  - Providing time and opportunities for teachers to share and develop good practice.
  - Placing more emphasis on numeracy.
  - Improving resources and accommodation.  
(Paragraphs 3, 12, 89)
  
- (4) Develop good practice in, and more diverse approaches to, teaching pupils with special educational needs by:
  - Seeking appropriate training for key staff.
  - Appointing a specialist teacher of SEN as soon as possible.  
(Paragraphs 24, 43, 58, 70, 85, 92, 137)
  
- (5) Improve pupils' targets for academic improvement by:
  - Improving the way in which they are written so that they indicate more clearly what pupils need to do to make even better progress and attain higher standards.
  - Ensuring the targets inform teachers how to adapt their work so that pupils are more likely to reach them.  
(Paragraphs 35, 67, 69, 70, 85)

In addition to the above, the governors may wish to take action to address the following less significant weaknesses in their action plan.

- A lack of spirituality within the curriculum and insufficient co-ordination of spiritual, social and cultural education. (Paragraphs 51, 52, 56, 102, 175)
- The under-use of computers within English, mathematics, science, art, religious education and physical education. (Paragraphs 102, 119, 129, 138, 165, 166, 184)
- Insufficiently tight procedures for monitoring pupils' attendance in lessons. (Paragraph 72)
- Increase the range of competitive sport. (Paragraphs 49, 178)
- Unsatisfactory accommodation and decoration in science and physical education. (Paragraph 89)
- Insufficient technical support staff. (Paragraphs 88, 130, 144)
- Insufficient resources, particularly computers. (Paragraphs 90, 119, 168, 172)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	103
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	30

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1	22	40	33	4	0	0

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

### Information about the school's pupils

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	383	19
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	62	

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	18	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	177	1

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	24
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	22

### Attendance

<b>Authorised absence</b>	%
School data	8.1
National comparative data	5.9

<b>Unauthorised absence</b>	%
School data	0.3
National comparative data	0.4

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



*Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3*

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	40	31	71

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	14	18	14
	Girls	13	13	7
	Total	27	31	21
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	38(22)	44(36)	30(14)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	7(0)	14 (17)	0(1)
	National	28(28)	42(38)	30(23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	13	21	13
	Girls	10	16	11
	Total	23	37	24
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	33 (30)	51 (46)	34 (32)
	National	64 (64)	66(64)	62(60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	7(7)	17(23)	13 (10)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

*Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4*

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	52	36	88

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	7	44	48
	Girls	16	33	35
	Total	23	27	83
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	26 (11)	88(89)	94 (93)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	26.8 (26.7)
	National	38.4(38.0)

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

*Attainment at the end of the sixth form*

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	20	100
	National		73.2

**Ethnic background of pupils**

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	3
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	
White	379
Any other minority ethnic group	

**Exclusions in the last school year**

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	23	
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: Y[ ] – Y[ ]**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	22
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

**Education support staff: Y7 Y12**

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	174

**Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y12**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73
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**Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	24
Key Stage 4	22

**Financial information**

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	1092675
Total expenditure	1092618
Expenditure per pupil	2802
Balance brought forward from previous year	-245634
Balance carried forward to next year	-245577

## ***Results of the survey of parents and carers***

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	400
Number of questionnaires returned	80

### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	39	46	5	9	1
My child is making good progress in school.	42	48	6	1	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	24	56	9	4	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	22	38	28	11	1
The teaching is good.	30	61	5	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	30	50	14	4	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	59	40	1	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	51	44	1	0	4
The school works closely with parents.	34	44	15	1	6
The school is well led and managed.	42	42	6	1	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	34	52	4	5	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	22	51	13	4	11

### **Other issues raised by parents**

At the parents' meeting, parents emphasised that the school was much better thought of in the community now than in the recent past.

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

### **ENGLISH**

96. Pupils' attainment in English on entry to the school has improved in the last two years, but remains well below the national average. By the end of year 9, over the four years 1997 to 2000, pupils' test results in English are well below national averages and very low in comparison with standards achieved by pupils in similar schools. However, well over a third of pupils attained level 5 or better in 2000, a significant improvement on 1999 when only just over a fifth of pupils did. The school trend of improvement, measured by average points score, has been better than the national trend in English, but not in other core subjects. Girls attain better than boys at this age, but boys are improving faster. Pupils' attainment in GCSE in 2000 remained well below the national average, although the proportion attaining an A\*-C grade improved. Only about a third of Year 11 is entered for English Literature GCSE, but a high proportion of those, 83 per cent, attain grades A\*-C.

97. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are below national standards at both key stages. Most pupils respond keenly to questions, offering answers that indicate that they have listened carefully. There is no inappropriate calling out. In the best lessons, pupils respond well when asked for evidence or textual reference to support personal views, but only the most able pupils can do this well. Techniques are effectively adapted from the National Literacy Strategy to introduce key words and to extend pupils' vocabulary. In formal work the quality of their expression improves over both key stages as pupils learn more accurate use of technical terminology related to media, poetry or the study of literature. However, in discussions and in role-play, standards of spoken English are often poor and pupils rely heavily on vernacular and colloquial expressions when the formal context requires standard English. In the worst cases, noticeably in Year 9, pupils' expression even in "Express Groups" is ungrammatical and disjointed. The highest attaining pupils in Key Stage 4 can argue a case or interpret a character, for example when discussing "An Inspector Calls", with good understanding, fluency and commitment, but in language inferior in range and precision to the task. Social and language skills are being developed together in lessons intended to teach pupils how to achieve well in discussion.

98. Reading skills are well below national standards for many pupils at both key stages. Pupils hear good examples of teachers reading well, but very few instances were observed of pupils being asked to read aloud. The "Culture Club" for Years 7 and 8 encourages the reading of poetry and short stories and a Reading Club and a Reading Week are reported to be under consideration, but currently there are insufficient activities like reading time, paired reading or reading clubs which would motivate pupils to develop their skills. At Key Stage 3 class readers are not widely used and pupils are not systematically required to present reviews of their private reading. Pupils on GCSE courses do not take set texts home for personal study. Pupils are encouraged to use dictionaries in lessons and to note the spellings of new words, which they do successfully. Pupils learn research skills and how to use the library as part of the "Literacy at Key Stage 3" programme in which they complete a personal project. For general research the library is not easily accessible and contains no facilities for research via the Internet or through the use of CD-ROMS.

99. Pupils' quality of writing is broadly in line with national expectations for those of highest prior attainment and below or well below national average for just over half of the pupils. It is lower in Year 9 than in Year 8. Pupils with special educational needs receive good support and achieve well. Some pupils use computers at home to produce well-presented assignments. Good examples of desktop publishing skills were seen, most noticeably in GCSE coursework. At all ages pupils write fluently and at length when engaged in creative writing. The most able GCSE pupils can write cogent,

developed arguments in essays on formal subjects. Pupils have a good understanding of the aims and expectations associated with written tasks and are made aware of the criteria by which they will be assessed. This is an area where teaching has improved since the last inspection. At Key Stage 3 comments sometimes refer to National Curriculum levels and at Key Stage 4 the marking usually indicates the GCSE grade at which pupils are working. Teachers mark thoroughly, but do not require pupils to correct the spelling and expression errors identified.

100. The quality of teaching is good overall. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. In more than half of lessons observed teaching was good or very good. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and teach basic skills well. Pupils respond positively as teachers manage them well, so little time is lost in controlling poor behaviour. Lessons are well planned. Teaching methods are effective. Tasks are generally appropriate to the level of the teaching group, but more searching follow-up questions and more demanding homework could be set for higher attaining pupils. The best lessons include activities engaging the pupils in tasks to develop speaking and listening, reading and writing, but some lessons give pupils no opportunity to read aloud and on occasions poor quality spoken English is not corrected. Good use of group tasks requires pupils to work together and organise themselves rather than be reliant on teachers. This is particularly effective when pupils have to evaluate their own progress and the performance of others. Good relationships exist between pupils and with teachers. Skilful teaching gives pupils the confidence to discuss ideas in public and to develop maturity and self-expression. Day to day assessment of pupils' work is good. Marking is well done. Pupils are clear about the aims and the standards that will apply to a task before they start. The school 'APE' marking system is consistently used so that pupils know what they have done well. Comments include a balance of praise and specific directions about what could be improved. The use of 'next step targets' for improvement is good, but is not universally used by all teachers.

101. The curriculum is broad and balanced and offers equal opportunities to all pupils. National Curriculum requirements are fulfilled and the grouping by pupil prior attainment is an effective measure in trying to meet the needs of pupils of all abilities. Good procedures exist for assessing pupils' progress and attainment and detailed portfolios go with them as they move up the school. At Key Stage 4 the curriculum meets GCSE syllabus requirements. Good use of learning support assistants and amendments to schemes of work ensure that pupils with special educational needs have suitable activities. Gifted and talented pupils are not recognised.

102. With the exception of ICT, which is insufficiently used in English, the curriculum provides a good range of learning opportunities. However, opportunities for pupils to improve research skills and for private study are restricted by lack of access to the library. There is a clinic for Year 11 pupils wishing to improve their examination grades and there is a "Culture Club" for pupils in Years 7 and 8. Pupils have visited the Dickens Centre in Rochester, but theatre trips are rarely arranged. In the last two years a 'Talent Show' has been organised, but there has been no school drama production. There is no tradition of magazine writing or of public speaking. Through the study of peoples' situations in literature and the development of pupils' abilities to express considered opinions on a range of issues, the English curriculum makes a valuable contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural education of all pupils. However, extra curricular activities to extend pupils' social and cultural experiences are limited.

103. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Aims and procedures are clearly set out and match the values of the school. Development planning has been sound, but it will need to be reviewed if the nature of the intake continues to change. The development of literacy was raised as a key issue by the last inspection and the leadership of the department has been influential in the formulation of the school's literacy policy. Teachers are deployed according to their qualifications and experience. Temporary appointments have worked well, and the quality of teaching has been maintained, but it

would be an advantage if a permanent team of specialist English teachers were able to share responsibilities and development tasks. Procedures for the monitoring of teachers' performance have been introduced and need to be developed further. Classrooms are good, close together and are well maintained with good displays of pupils' work, key words and posters. Recent schemes of work are good and should be developed further to provide better for pupils with a wide range of attainment. They should also include appropriate references to the use of ICT. Book resources, for private reading and the study of examination texts are not adequate.

104. Since the last inspection standards of work have risen at both key stages. Teaching and the management of pupils have improved. Departmental Progress Reports have been developed and pupils' work is better assessed in relation to National Curriculum levels and examination criteria. The teaching of grammar is now more effectively integrated into schemes of work. The English department has played a leading role in the progress made by the school to develop pupils' literacy. The use of ICT within lessons has not improved since the last inspection and remains a weakness.

### **DRAMA [EXPRESSIVE ARTS]**

105. Called in the school, 'Expressive Arts', drama is currently being taught to pupils in Key Stage 3. Some drama skills, for example tableaux and freeze frame techniques are taught but the emphasis is on investigation of ideas and self-expression. Speaking and listening skills in drama are below the national average at Key Stage 3, but the drama skills and techniques observed were broadly in line with standards appropriate to that age. In the few lessons seen, teaching was satisfactory or good. Small groups and the presence of two teachers help all pupils, including those with special educational needs, to achieve well. Pupils enjoy their lessons and respond well to tasks that ask them to investigate relevant issues like 'peer pressure' and 'bullying'. They have the confidence to work in groups and to perform before their classmates. They can evaluate their own performance and that of their peers, both in terms of the maturity with which the issues were explored and the quality of the dramatic presentation. In both respects, drama is making a valuable contribution to pupils' moral and social education. 'Talent Shows' have been organised for the last two years, but there is no recent tradition of major drama productions involving large numbers of pupils. At the time of the inspection there was no head of department in post. Temporary appointments are working out fortuitously, but the school will need to consider appropriate long-term arrangements.

### **MATHEMATICS**

106. Pupils' attainment in mathematics, in the 2000 end of Year 9 tests, was well below the national average by all measures. When compared with the results obtained by pupils from secondary modern schools in 1999, results were below average. Over the years 1998 to 2000 the test results did not follow the national trend of improvement.

107. Results in the 2000 GCSE examinations were well below the national average for the proportion of pupils gaining grades A\* to C, and in line for that gaining grades A\* to G, but show a marked improvement over recent years. Compared with other secondary modern schools results for 1999 the mathematics scores are broadly average. Results are broadly in line with other subjects in the school with boys performing relatively better than girls for the year 2000.

108. The attainment of the pupils in mathematics on entry to the school is well below average. The pupils' work shows that they achieve well, but are still attaining well below national standards. Pupils' powers of retention are poor so that hard work in lessons, supported by good teaching, is not reflected in examinations and tests.

109. By the time they are fourteen the pupils' mathematical skills have improved, as has their ability to draw more accurately in geometry. Mental mathematics is improved by regular short concentrated sessions at the beginning of almost every lesson. Pupils in Year 7 are better at multiplication tables due to the positive effect of the National Numeracy Strategy in primary schools. Higher attaining 14 year old pupils can draw a scattergram, although some can not use it to find a line of best fit and interpret results from it. In one lesson all of the top set pupils showed good understanding of how a number line from 0 to 1 can be used to show probability of events occurring but did not grasp the underlying principles of probability. Some lower attaining pupils have difficulty with mental mathematics. They are uncertain when asked problems such as, "What is one fifth plus one fifth?" Some say "A half," others have no idea. Many pupils can solve simple equations such as  $2x+1 = 5$  using number machines.

110. Higher attaining pupils aged sixteen can draw straight-line graphs from the equation ' $y = mx + c$ ', although some cannot calculate the  $m$  and  $c$  values for a given linear equation. Most can give numbers in standard form but some have difficulties for numbers less than one. Middle achieving pupils have shown good progress in applying the trigonometry of right-angled triangles, and in algebraic manipulation, but these are still not strengths. Lower attaining pupils are more confident in their work and produce more of it. Work for the Graduated Assessment Profiles is good at levels one and two. They can, for example, put numbers expressed to two decimal places in order and know the difference between mean, median and mode. Most, however, still have difficulty finding other than simple percentages of any given quantity or amount.

111. The mathematics department contributes to the school's General National Vocational Qualification programme in the sixth form. It teaches the 'application of number module' for the Key Skills element. It was not possible to see any lessons during the week of the inspection because the students were on work experience. Discussion with their teacher and scrutiny of some of their exercise books shows that the students are making progress in line with their prior attainment and producing a satisfactory volume of work.

112. Pupils with special educational needs, in line with their peers, achieve well at between 11 and 16. They receive good individual help in the classroom from substantial numbers of learning support assistants who contribute well to this level of success.

113. Teaching is good. No lessons were unsatisfactory and over half were good. Most teaching has high expectations of pupils. Pupils are encouraged to work consistently hard and not fear challenge. Consequently pupils gain in confidence as they get older. Classroom organisation and pupil management is good, time is not wasted and pupils learn well in their lessons. Most teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the subject and innovations in it, such as the National Numeracy Strategy. Almost every lesson begins with a short warm-up session and ends with a summary of what has been covered and what is to come next. In most lessons, and in all of the more successful ones, homework is set as a part of the main body of the lesson so that the pupils have plenty of time to record what has to be done in their planners.

114. Pupils' homework is almost always marked. There are particularly good examples where pupils have marked their own classwork and the teacher has appended notes and advice to this marking. Departmental policy is that pupils mark their own work in class. This can encourage pupils to be more aware of where they are going wrong. However, some work is left wrongly marked or not marked at all. Sometimes teachers leave books unchecked and the standards of pupils' work suffers.



115. A range of rewards for good work is used. They include the weekly award of "Star of the Week", merits, certificates and a headteacher's commendation. Pupils value these and find them motivating.

116. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are never less than satisfactory and in three quarters of lessons pupils' behaviour and attitudes to their work are good or better. In these lessons pupils concentrate while listening, try hard at written and graphical work, and behave well.

117. Relationships in the classroom both between the teachers and pupils and amongst pupils themselves are very good. This results from the quality of teachers' work and their desire to ensure that their pupils succeed. The quality of these relationships contributes significantly to pupils' progress.

118. Whilst overall figures and percentages do not reveal absence as a major weakness there are very few pupils whose attendance is perfect. Short intermittent absences for a significant number of pupils hampers their own learning and makes teaching more difficult to organise for those who are always present.

119. The mathematics curriculum is broad and balanced at both key stages. It covers all required elements of the national curriculum with the exception of the use of ICT. Pupils use computers to write up course and project work employing skills in word processing, data handling and spreadsheet work that they have acquired in information technology lessons. There is a policy for the use of computers in the mathematics department and the use of computer-aided learning is addressed within the mathematics schemes of work. There are five computers in one of the mathematics classrooms that are well used. Access to the school's main computer provision is limited and the departmental scheme of work for ICT is not fully covered. Pupils cannot access the Internet in any of the rooms in which mathematics is regularly taught.

120. Teaching of skills in numeracy has improved. There is an established whole school approach for the teaching of numeracy with guidance set out for teachers in all departments to use. A curriculum mapping exercise shows where in the curriculum overall numeracy skills are being addressed. Literacy is also addressed. Pupils are encouraged to use language carefully, when speaking to the class or answering questions, and teachers are generally careful to insist on correct use of vocabulary in both written and oral work. Important words are displayed on the wall or written on the board.

121. Departmental leadership is good. The head of department has brought the department a long way forward in the short time she has been with the school. She is beginning to weld together a mixture of teachers, some of whom are relatively inexperienced or not specifically qualified in mathematics, into an effective team. She has produced new schemes of work for the whole school. Teaching is very well supported by her classroom observation of teachers and good quality feedback to them each term. Regular team meetings keep the teachers on course. More effective monitoring of teachers' marking is needed to enable further improvement to be made.

122. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. All of the many issues, referred to in the last report as in need of attention, have been addressed. Many teachers are new and teaching is very much improved. Arrangements for assessing pupils' work have been reviewed and are also much improved. Links with the primary schools are closer. Exam results are better.

## **SCIENCE**

123. At the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' performance in the end of Year 9 tests in 2000 was well below the national average. The proportion of pupils who obtained level 5 or above was well below the national average and the proportion reaching level 6 or above was very low in comparison with the national average. The proportion of pupils who obtained level 5 or above, in science was similar to that for English and mathematics but the proportion reaching level 6 or above was below that for English and mathematics. In comparison with similar schools the proportion of pupils' reaching level 5 or above in the tests was below average and the proportion reaching level 6 was very low. There was little difference between the test performance of boys and girls. Test results for pupils at the end of Year 9 have gone down slightly since the last inspection although the test results for 2000 show an

improvement on 1999. On the basis of pupils' prior attainment at the end of Year 6, many pupils are not reaching their expected levels particularly at level 6 or above and the department needs to consider ways of raising the overall standard of pupils' attainment in Key Stage 3.

124. In 2000, the proportion of pupils who obtained A\*-C grades in the GCSE was well below the national average and the proportion who achieved the highest grades was very low. The proportion of pupils who obtained grades A\*-G was above the national average and girls outperformed boys in line with the national picture. When compared with other subjects, pupils performed less well in science than in mathematics but better in science than in English. In comparison with other schools the proportion of pupils who obtained A\*-C grades was below average but in relation to their prior attainment at Key Stage 3 pupils generally reached their expected grades. Over the last three years, the proportion of pupils obtaining A\*-C grades has increased significantly.

125. In Key Stage 3 the standard of work seen is below average but indicates a higher level than that obtained by national testing. Often pupils have a grasp of a scientific principle but are unable to verbalise this without appropriate prompting or cannot translate their ideas into written form. Similarly pupils' analysis of experimental results is often hampered by lack of numeracy skills. For example, in a Year 9 second set only a few pupils were able to draw a line graph in order to gain marks in an end of topic test on 'Health'. Achievement in lessons is generally satisfactory in Years 7 and 8 but less so in Year 9 where there are more examples of poorly presented work and graffiti. Pupils conduct scientific enquiries in which they are able to observe, measure and record experimental results. They can make predictions and draw conclusions but few are able to relate these to scientific knowledge and understanding.

126. In Key Stage 4 the standard of work seen is below average but again verbalisation or translation of a scientific idea into written form is problematic for many pupils. For example, in a second set Year 11 group, pupils were able to see what was happening to certain ammonia compounds when they were heated but did not know the correct or appropriate words to describe the process. Pupils know and understand the harmful effects of smoking, the electron arrangements in atoms, what a fuse is for and how it works, and how the body regulates its temperature. However, insufficient numbers of pupils have the numerical skills to deal with kilowatt-hour calculations and resistors in parallel problems. With scientific enquiry many pupils are able to make predictions based upon scientific evidence they can plot line graphs but are not always able to draw the best line of fit. Pupils in a Year 11 top set were able to plan an experiment on how to speed up a chemical reaction using marble chips and different concentrations of acid and were able to formulate a prediction based upon the molecular theory. There are some good examples in using ICT to prepare final drafts of GCSE coursework, but few examples in the use of ICT for data capture.

127. Teaching is satisfactory in both key stages. In four fifths of the lessons seen at Key Stage 3, the teaching seen was satisfactory or better and one fifth was unsatisfactory. In one fifth of the lessons seen the teaching was good. At Key Stage 4, in four fifths of the lessons seen the teaching was satisfactory or better and unsatisfactory in one fifth of the lessons seen. In half the lessons seen the teaching was good. Overall the teaching is better at Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3. Good teaching results in good learning where pupils know exactly what to do, have the prerequisite skills to benefit from the lesson and are constantly focused onto the task by the teacher. For example, in a Year 7 lesson on energy, a well-structured work sheet was used to accompany a video on energy, to test, reinforce, and introduce new knowledge on energy conservation. The teacher ensured that pupils could read and understand each statement on the worksheet before the video commenced and prompted them at key points throughout the lesson. Most pupils developed a good understanding of how energy can be conserved. In a Year 11 lesson on air pollution the teacher ensured that the pupils understood the meanings of the technical words to be used and had the necessary numeracy skills to

interpret pollutant concentrations. This, together with a variety of relevant activities resulted in most pupils knowing the main pollutants from vehicle emissions and being able to understand their harmful effects. Teaching is unsatisfactory when pupils do not know what to do or why they are doing it and cannot read or understand the worksheets. The timing of some lessons resulted in a crucial task having to be rushed at the end of the lesson because the pace of earlier tasks had been too leisurely. The department needs to consider ways of sharing good practice with all teachers, particularly in Key Stage 3.

128. The behaviour of pupils and their attitude towards the subject and their teachers is satisfactory. It is good when stimulating work is provided for the pupils and good relationships are established between the teacher and pupils. In a third of the lessons seen attendance was poor and insufficiently monitored.

129. The science curriculum provides breadth and balance at Key Stage 3 and the time allocation is adequate. In Key Stage 4 the dilution of double award science does not support national recommendations although statutory requirements are met for both key stages. The time allocated for double award science is minimal. Schemes of work for both key stages are in place. The opportunities for pupils to acquire the basic skills of literacy and numeracy are satisfactory although this remains an area in need of further development. Although the ICT skills of word processing are encouraged the use of sensors and data logging is in considerable need of development. Pupils with special educational needs generally have access to the curriculum and are often supported by learning support assistants. Good procedures for the monitoring of pupils' progress are used.

130. The efficient management of adequate resources support the pupils' learning together with efficient and effective technical support although the latter is often overstretched. Flammable, toxic, hazardous and radioactive materials are stored in accordance with statutory requirements and the arrangements for the safety of pupils including risk assessments are satisfactory. The accommodation is adequate, although not inspiring, and all science lessons are taught in a laboratory.

131. Effective leadership and sound management, set against a difficult period of frequent staff changes, have secured pupil progress in several areas. A comprehensive departmental handbook is in place to support staff and the induction arrangements for new staff are satisfactory. Regular departmental meetings are held and a common vision for improving standards is encouraged.

132. Since the last inspection the proportion of pupils obtaining a grade C or above at the end of Key Stage 4 has increased and the proportion of good teaching seen in Key Stage 4 has doubled.

## **ART AND DESIGN**

133. At the time of the inspection the art teaching was in some disarray with the third successive supply teacher covering for a maternity leave in this one-teacher department.

134. Standards of attainment in art are currently below average. Teacher assessments in 2000 show standards to be just below average. The standards attained by pupils in GCSE examinations in 2000 were below the national average for similar schools with just over a quarter of pupils gaining the higher A\*-C grades compared to just over a half of pupils nationally. All pupils, however, attained at least a D grade making the average points score for the group very close to the national average.

135. The evidence of work, from some months ago, in folders and sketchbooks shows a satisfactory standard of attainment with pupils achieving satisfactorily over time. By the age of 14 higher attaining pupils are beginning to show confidence and control in their use of line and tone in

drawings from observation. They also show careful painting skills in their recreations of African designs. Lower attaining pupils are less precise and rarely review and modify their work. Between the ages of 14 and 16 most pupils make good progress reflecting the greater commitment of time and effort involved in the GCSE course. At this level, pupils' graphic design skills are good, with several pupils showing their interest and a good level of skill in comic book illustration. However, lower attaining pupils show an over reliance on copying from other pictures. Higher attaining pupils make good connections between their own work and their extensive studies of other artists.

136. The standard of work seen in lessons during the inspection was unsatisfactory in both key stages though there were considerable variations within this. In each of the lessons a small proportion of the pupils produced work that was at or above the expected standard for their age. Most pupils showed insufficient creative effort and were uncritical of their work.

137. The quality of teaching seen during the inspection was unsatisfactory overall though with some strengths. In Key Stage 3 teaching was unsatisfactory in two out of three lessons and good in the remainder. The most significant factors affecting standards of work were the unsatisfactory management of pupils and insufficiently clear expectations of pupils' attainment and behaviour. In each of the lessons seen, a minority of three or four pupils were a disruptive influence on the lesson as a whole with frequent calling out and interruption of the teacher's delivery. In lessons where the teacher did not take effective control of the class at the outset, the levels of incidental talking were unacceptable and over half of the pupils did not listen to instructions. Where pupils were attentive, as in the Year 7 work on 'War of the Worlds', they rose to the challenge and produced good designs. In Key Stage 4 the quality of teaching was satisfactory with good individual support to pupils suggesting improvements to their work. The task of copying an artist's work was undemanding and many pupils were unsure of its purpose. A common feature to all lessons was the positive support and extra attention given to lower attaining pupils. Provision for pupils with special educational needs was unsatisfactory. The supply teacher did not have the necessary information to specifically identify these pupils and therefore was not able to accurately target support for them.

138. The absent head of department has created good guidelines for art in the department handbook including a good scheme of work that is well matched to the National Curriculum and GCSE courses. The supply teachers have progressively narrowed the range of activities offered, including the use of computers, in response to poor behaviour by pupils to a point that is now unsatisfactory in Key Stage 3. The head teacher and senior management team are supportive of the present supply teacher and frequently visit art lessons to monitor pupils' behaviour. An unqualified teacher has been transferred from the drama department to give additional support in art. Advisory support for GCSE pupils and an allowance for new art materials have also been provided.

139. Progress made in the subject since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory. Significant improvements have been made in response to the last report, particularly with regard to research and painting skills in Key Stage 4. The lack of continuity in teaching over the last six months has been unsettling for the pupils and detrimental to their learning.

140. The necessary structures are in place for this to become a successful art department but there is a great need for a period of stability for its potential to be realised.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

141. Teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 indicate that pupils are achieving standards higher than average. Observation of lessons and scrutiny of work also provides evidence of this. Work in folders is progressive and emphasis is placed on the correct usage of key words and a

technical vocabulary. Pupil learning is supported by use of a framework in which they experience focused tasks and design assignments. Pupils are aware of the detailed requirements of assignments and are clear of the assessment implications. Within this structure pupils are able to generate and develop their ideas and, in this, they are successful. The quality of folders is generally satisfactory and there are examples of good work. The quality of graphics is sound and there is evidence of use of ICT skills. Work is well presented and pupils take care with writing and planning. In food and textiles practical skills are well developed and enable pupils to produce good quality products. Manufacturing skills in product design in resistant materials are less well developed because of a break in teaching this specialism. Pupils with low prior attainment are making good progress when they are set appropriate targets. Higher attaining pupils demonstrate a personal style and make good progress when given challenging work. Many pupils enjoy their work and are motivated to do well although attendance levels are poor in some groups.

142. Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is at least in line with national averages for the range of courses offered. Pupils may opt for a GCSE course from food, textiles and child development. After a lapse, product design in resistant materials is also now available. The work is more focused than in the previous stage and it makes different demands on pupils. Pupils generate and develop their ideas using a combination of graphics and text. Emphasis is placed on the correct usage of language and improvement in this area is evident. Pupils acquire knowledge and develop their skills through a number of minor and major assignments. They develop planning and presentational skills in their design folders and manufacture a variety of products in different materials. Pupils are provided with a clear outline of their tasks, timescales and success criteria. This support has enabled many pupils to improve their examination grades and produce work of a good standard. Last year the proportion of pupils gaining higher grades A\* - C in external examinations was generally higher than national averages (48 per cent in food technology; 83 per cent in textiles and 61 per cent in child development). There was no examination in resistant materials but a number of pupils were entered for graphic products GCSE. Results in this were poor with 8 per cent of pupils gaining higher grades. A more settled staffing situation is already providing evidence that further improvement is possible.

143. Pupils are making good use of their ICT skills in the context of subject studies, especially in design folders. Many pupils demonstrate considerable enthusiasm for their studies and are motivated to both behave and do well. Pupils are attentive and listen to instructions and most are able to concentrate for appropriate periods of time. Pupils observe codes of conduct in specialist rooms and attitudes towards work are generally positive. Health and safety matters are given a high priority and pupils demonstrate a sensible approach to practical work. Pupils with special educational needs are clearly identified by staff and learning assistants support them well. Assessment profiles enable the teachers to negotiate clear future targets with pupils and their progress towards them is periodically reviewed. Teachers provide a good structure to the work and pupils are clear about what is expected of them in terms of quality and time. Good teaching and appropriate lesson planning has enabled pupils to make good progress and improve their levels of attainment.

144. Teachers are hard working and they organise their resources well. The quality of teaching is very good and there are examples of very good and excellent teaching. The best lessons had pace, high expectations, structure and purpose and teachers demonstrated good control and management of pupils. The assessment scheme is comprehensive and detailed and individual pupil profiles are stored centrally. Assessment profile sheets provide teachers with a wealth of information on individual pupil progress and attainment. The process also provides pupils with important feedback about the quality of their work. Teachers use display well and this contributes a great deal to pupil interest and the development of ideas. Extra curricular opportunities add breadth to the range of studies and provide

links with agencies outside school. Teachers work well as a team. There is no technician support and this throws a considerable extra burden on to teachers to provide basic services in specialist rooms.

145. The department is led by an experienced and able teacher with a clear vision of the work of the department. Administration and documentation, including schemes of work, are exemplary. The high quality of management and leadership is clearly reflected in the success of the pupils and the standing of the department. Some rooms have been refurbished and the quality of accommodation is much improved since the last inspection. Specialist rooms reflect a good standard of care and organisation and display is a major factor that contributes to an attractive and stimulating environment. The shortcomings of the resistant materials course have been addressed and a new teacher has been appointed, workshops refurbished and extra support provided. These initiatives are beginning to have a positive effect. There has been an increase in the use of ICT but further provision is required to enable pupils to fully use their skills within design and technology. There is also a need to provide opportunities for computer assisted design and manufacture. At present, financial support is limited and is inadequate for a successful department like this. Currently there is a shortage of textbooks, materials, tools and machines. This is a successful department that has made many improvements since the last inspection.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

146. Teacher assessments in 2000 showed pupils' standards of work, at the end of Year 9, were below the national average although they had improved from the previous year, particularly at the higher levels. There was no significant difference between the performance of girls and boys. Evidence from lesson observations during this inspection, together with the analysis of pupils' work, confirms that standards are below the national average but they show signs of improvement in years 7 and 8.

147. In 2000, the proportion of pupils attaining GCSE grades A\* -C were well below the national average and below the average for modern schools. The proportion of A\*-C grades has improved significantly since the last inspection, but the proportion getting A\*-G grades has declined. The very small number of girls who entered the examination in 2000 performed better than the boys, but there were no passes at the higher grades. Pupils generally did less well in geography GCSE than in their other subjects.

148. Pupils achieve well in Key Stage 3. Many of them enter the school with low levels of geographical knowledge but they are quickly introduced to stimulating activities that extend their understanding. Pupils use a wide variety of geographical skills successfully. In a very good lesson in Year 7, they were able to produce accurate graphs recording changes in the discharge of a river after a rainstorm. Those with special educational needs were given suitably adapted materials that enabled them to plot the changing pattern clearly. Some higher attaining pupils could relate this activity to wider aspects of the water cycle and to their previous learning on flood patterns in Bangladesh. Throughout Key Stage 3, pupils reflect on lifestyles in many different parts of the world. For example, in their study of Kenya, they appreciate the impact of migration and poverty on urban conditions in Nairobi. Pupils' literacy skills are encouraged through a wide range of imaginative tasks, but standards of written work are often low. Many pupils find it difficult to write accurately and fluently. The presentation of work is often poor and lower attaining pupils have difficulty in completing written tasks in lessons. Despite their desire to answer questions, many pupils lack confidence in explaining their ideas. However, they show enthusiasm for their work and are keen to pursue research tasks for homework. Colourful displays and the celebration of good work in the classroom encourage pupils' achievement.

149. The number of pupils choosing to study geography in Key Stage 4 is small and has declined over the last two years. Achievement in this key stage is satisfactory. Pupils are given generous help in the production of their course work, often outside lesson times, so that they all complete it on time. Standards of presentation, sometimes incorporating ICT skills, are often high. However, higher attaining pupils are not always guided towards sufficiently challenging and accurate investigations that allow them to achieve at the highest levels. Pupils with special educational needs in the current Year 11 find many aspects of the work particularly demanding. For example, they had difficulty in understanding and recording information from a video on aspects of alternative energy. The presence of a learning support assistant in some lessons increases their rate of progress. Pupils in Year 10 did not receive sufficiently clear instructions on an industrial location exercise to enable them to complete it successfully. The passive, quiet, attitude of most of the girls in both year groups means that they do not always ask for help when they need it. On occasions the lack of concentration of some boys leads to disruptive behaviour and restricts learning opportunities for the whole group.

150. Teaching is good. Of the three lessons observed in Key Stage 3, all were at least good and two were very good. All the lessons observed in Key Stage 4 were judged to be satisfactory. The very good relationships that teachers have with pupils help to increase pupils' self-confidence. The best lessons are characterised by very good management of pupils, the preparation of a variety of appropriate resources that build steadily on pupils' prior knowledge and the introduction of activities that encourage independent learning. Teaching is less successful where occasionally time is lost through the unsatisfactory behaviour of some boys and where the pace of learning is slow. Newly created homework booklets in Key Stage 3 enable the teachers to extend the learning from lessons with a series of imaginative tasks. The consistent use of these booklets means that pupils now know exactly what is expected of them in advance and they are developing good habits of regular, independent work of a satisfactory standard. Homework and class books are marked regularly, using grades that pupils know and understand, although helpful comments for improvement are not always included.

151. Leadership and management are good. The recently appointed head of department works with energy and commitment in her desire to raise attainment and to increase pupils' enjoyment of the subject. International links are fostered and good use is made of the local environment for fieldwork experiences. Members of the department work well together, sharing their experience and expertise and co-operating in the creation of a stimulating learning environment. The previous report identified the use of National Curriculum levels in assessment procedures as an area for development. The department has gone some way towards achieving this. Setting precise targets for each pupil, based on these levels, will enable pupils' progress to be recorded and tracked more rigorously. Results can then be used to guide curriculum planning and adapt future schemes of work. Good progress has been made since the last inspection, particularly in the development of more opportunities for the use of ICT and in the revision of learning opportunities in Key Stage 3. The department should now look critically at the provision it makes for all pupils in Key Stage 4, ensuring that it is appropriate and challenging for all levels of attainment.

## **HISTORY**

152. Teacher assessments for pupils at the end of Year 9 in 2000 show that the standards of work achieved were in line with national average expectations with 44 per cent of pupils either reaching, or exceeding, the national average standard. In GCSE examinations in 2000, the proportion of pupils attaining grades A\* to C was below the national average when compared to all schools, but was in line with the national average when compared to similar schools. For grades A\* to G, results were in line with national averages when compared to all schools and above average when compared to similar schools. The average points score for GCSE history pupils is above the average score for similar



schools. Both boys and girls achieved results better than those predicted based on their prior attainment, but girls make better progress than boys.

153. The attainment of present students in years 7, 8 and 9 is in line with national expectations, with a significant minority working at above this level. Similarly, the attainment of GCSE pupils in years 10 and 11 is close to national expectations. In lessons, most pupils make at least good progress. Many are very enthusiastic students of history. They have developed very good factual knowledge and the department's emphasis on promoting literacy skills enables many students to write good historical accounts. Suitable emphasis is placed in all classes on interpreting source material. All pupils are developing their interpretative skills. Higher attaining pupils can offer constructive criticisms of source material and can highlight bias and distinguish between fact and opinion. Though some pupils in all years struggle because of limited literacy skills, and for many their oral answers show more depth and understanding than is shown in their written work, all pupils are making good progress. This includes a large number of pupils who are identified as having special educational needs. Though classroom support is not always available for such pupils, their progress is similar to that of all other pupils in history.

154. The quality of teaching in history is very good and is making a significant contribution to the learning of all pupils. The high standard of teaching identified in the previous inspection report has been at least maintained. In all lessons observed, teaching was at least satisfactory and, in over 70 per cent of lessons, it was very good. Teachers are both knowledgeable and enthusiastic and their passion for history helps pupils to learn. Lessons are prepared well, expectations are high and pupils are consistently presented with challenges. The department's motto of 'no compromise' ensures that pupils are kept on task and the emphasis that is placed on substantial writing encourages independent learning. All pupils benefit from such challenges including those who have special educational needs. The careful planning of work set ensures that the degree of challenge is progressive and this allows pupils of different prior attainment to find their own level at which to work. For example, in a Year 9 lesson on the Blitz, pupils used a range of source material to identify the impact of German bombing on London. All could identify outcomes, but higher attainers developed the quality of their analysis and made very good links with propaganda and the need to maintain morale. In a Year 11 lesson on the development of railways in the USA, all pupils could identify certain key events, but higher attaining pupils were able to offer some ideas about the economic and social consequences of the development of the railway system. On rare occasions when teaching was less effective, lessons were too teacher-centred and the pace of pupils' work slowed.

155. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. The management of the department is very good and it is well resourced. Classrooms are lively with very good standards of displays including many examples of pupils' work. Schemes of work have been thoughtfully prepared and a very good contribution is made to the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, in their study of the Second World War, Year 9 pupils undertook a study of the contribution made to the war effort by soldiers from the British Empire. Such in-depth studies help to foster a wider awareness of historical events. The last report criticised the use of ICT in the school. Though no direct criticism was made of the history department, this criticism has been addressed. All history pupils now use ICT as part of their work and the standard of word-processed reports is good. Pupils are increasingly using the Internet for research and some are using bar and pie graphs to help their data analysis work. The department also places a very strong emphasis on developing literacy skills. Key words are emphasised, reading is encouraged and the constant emphasis placed on substantial writing is helping all pupils to learn and to make progress.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

156. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2000 indicated that pupils were average in attainment. Inspection evidence indicates that pupils' attainment is below average by the end of Key Stage 3. However, pupils are able to tackle a wide range of activities within the National Curriculum programmes of study. For example, word processing, databases, spreadsheets, desk-top publishing and Internet searches. Though many resources are of good quality, including computers, software and printers, they are insufficient in number or range and most pupils' work using computers takes place in computer lessons. Within these lessons pupils get a good grounding in what they need to know, but insufficient use of computers elsewhere means pupils are not confident and independent workers. Consequently their attainment falls below average.

157. Pupils enter the school with a wide range of attainment related to the use of computers. Some have acquired few skills, a few are very competent, largely due to the influence of parents and equipment available at home. From Year 7 to year 9 pupils achieve well and all make good progress in lessons, including the high proportion with special educational needs. Year 7 pupils can enter simple data into a spreadsheet, use the software features to manipulate the numbers, for example add them up, and create a pie-chart graph from them. Their keyboard skills are variable, from hesitant two finger typing to good use of both hands. Like all pupils in the school, they would benefit from document holders at the side of computers to help them develop good techniques.

158. In Year 8, pupils' keyboard skills have improved and their understanding of spreadsheets is broader. Their standard of numeracy is supported through the use of 'average' and, for higher attainers, rounding up or down decimal numbers. They are also required to listen attentively to quite complex instructions, later reinforced by clear teacher's notes. They do both these tasks very well indeed and their very good behaviour enables the teacher to get around the class and support individuals well, including the high proportion with special educational needs. Higher attaining pupils, though, need more challenging tasks to take their good ICT skills further.

159. In Year 9 pupils are in a similar position to Year 7 because the good equipment currently in the school is recent and they came into the very poor ICT position recognised by the last OFSTED report. However, during this inspection, they were producing very credible work related to foreign travel, creating desk top published notepaper and writing letters pertaining to be from a travel agents. This work supported their literacy well as they had to include clear and accurate information. Pupils of all attainment levels were well supported by this activity as its 'openness' allowed them success with something simple or more complex. What it lacked were opportunities to use the Internet to do some research about the destinations they were interested in or to review how travel agents use the Web to sell their wares.

160. In 2000, 18 pupils were entered for Information Systems GCSE, all passed and half got an A\*-C grade, well above the average for similar schools. 25 pupils were also entered for business studies, in which a significant amount of ICT is used, all passed and almost two thirds got an A\*-C grade, getting on for twice the average for similar schools. These are excellent results. They were also achieved against a background of very poor ICT provision that has only begun to be addressed since the last inspection.

161. The current Year 11 is the last year to take Information Systems as all Year 10 pupils are now following a GNVQ in ICT. It is a new 'on-line' course, delivered through the Internet, proving popular with many schools and can lead to the equivalent of 4 GCSE awards. Both Year 10 and 11 have had limited use of new equipment and they are in the process of 'catching-up'. Year 10 has a general knowledge of databases, both use and application, can follow instructions quickly, enter data and follow more complex instructions from worksheets. Their attainment ranges from below average to well below average though the latter is within a class containing a very high proportion of pupils with special

educational needs. Their attitudes and behaviour are very good and encouraged by very good management by the teacher and well-organised work that keeps their attention. They know what they have to do and get on with it. Their standard of spelling is very poor and teachers could do more to improve it.

162. The current Year 11 Information Systems class demonstrates attainment in-line with average expectations. They can access software quickly, read information and answer questions, including those relating to on-line Internet information that they search for. Their attitudes and behaviour are good, particularly the girls as a few boys can be a little too chatty and provocative. The teacher manages pupils quite well and reinforces spoken instructions with good use of an overhead projector. However, lessons would be even more effective if software was available to 'slave' pupils' machines to the teacher so she could cover complex operations better. Alternatively, or in addition, a large class monitor or a computer-linked projector would make the job easier. Overall, pupils in Year 10 and 11 achieve well.

163. Post-16 students follow Pitmans' qualifications that are recognised by industry. They are successful in these. No Year 12 students were seen during the inspection. However, work seen indicates all students are confident users of computers and can use word processors confidently. Their work also shows the relevant application of other tools such as spreadsheets and graphic packages. Students help train Learning Support Assistants in ICT to help them be even more effective in the classroom.

164. All teaching is good, some very good and is illustrated in the paragraphs above. It could be improved if a better range of resources, both hardware and software were available. Within the restrictions of current resources, more attention needs to be paid to the ICT skills pupils bring to the classroom. Some pupils could be used to support others more formally and this would help with their personal development. They are already good at helping one another out as they are sitting next to each other. The principal teacher of ICT also supports pupils well when they are out of lessons, completing work in various lunchtime and after school clubs. She also trains people from within the local community where there is an increasing demand for ICT skills.

165. The curriculum in Years 7-9 is well planned and meets National Curriculum requirements. Work on control is adequately covered within design and technology but the use of ICT for measurement is weak and needs to take place in science. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11, for most pupils is as described above and fully meets requirements in Year 10. The use of ICT by Year 11 pupils is closely monitored and meets requirements as best it can, given limited resources. Pupils not following an ICT examination course receive a school certificate indicating their accomplishments and their attainment is reported on at the end of Year 11.

166. Within other subject areas, French is making inroads into the use of the Internet and e-mail, geography is forging international links and producing graphs from data, history is analysing historical data and many subjects are doing some word processing and desk top publishing. Mathematics has a few machines that it uses appropriately. The shortage of good machines works against a general teacher willingness to use ICT more effectively. All are ready to move forward in their own training funded by the New Opportunities Fund.

167. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Since the last inspection work has been well co-ordinated and monitored and standards have risen. Resources have improved and National Grid for Learning for money has been well used to put in place the infrastructure for further development. A part time technician is now effectively used to keep systems working, saving both teachers' and pupils' time. During this inspection work began on connecting the library to the Internet

so that can become more akin to libraries of this millennium. More resources are needed to deliver all aspects of the ICT curriculum within all subject areas and an additional computer room is needed, particularly for the use of Year 7-9 pupils.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

168. Pupils' standards of work in Years 7 and 8 are broadly average, with some pupils showing considerable promise. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 have achieved well in French, displaying their ability to use dictionaries, handouts and other learning materials. They use words and simple language structures with confidence and, whilst their pronunciation is still developing, they feel safe in taking risks with the language when asked to read simple words and phrases out aloud. Their independent writing skills are limited with much of their writing being involved with copying of words or phrases. Changes of teacher and school problems prior to the last inspection contribute significantly to a weaker picture from Year 9. Pupils in Year 9 show some interest in French, but their achievement and attainment, overall, are less than what is expected of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3, with lower attaining pupils demonstrating little more than the most basic awareness of French grammar and vocabulary. In Key Stage 4, pupils' standards continue to trail behind expectations for 15 and 16 year olds. Having achieved unsatisfactorily, most pupils in Key Stage 4 are generally held back in their lessons. They are generally performing below pupils in comparable schools and their predicted grades are well below national averages. However, there has been a steady upward trend in GCSE results since the last inspection and the proportion of pupils gaining an A\*-C grade has risen (13 per cent in 1999, 17 per cent in 2000, predicted 24 per cent in 2001).

169. In Years 7 and 8, most pupils make good progress during their lessons. Their listening, reading, speaking and writing skills are developing well, with some pupils showing promise of becoming competent linguists. They are developing a healthy attitude towards a modern language and are keen to learn skills that will help them acquire and consolidate their French independently. This is often noticed in their written homework, which is usually both relevant and varied. The picture in Key Stage 4, however, is slightly less positive, with pupils attaining lower standards in speaking, writing, reading and listening. While many Key Stage 4 pupils are competent in recognising and recalling words and short phrases on familiar topics, their progress in lessons is slow and their commitment to the subject uncertain. Their writing is generally inadequate, their pronunciation lacks authenticity and their reading of short French passages betray unfamiliarity with the language.

170. Teaching is good. There were no unsatisfactory lessons and well over half was good or very good. Teaching is conducted largely in French to which almost all pupils respond positively. Teachers employ a variety of activities and resources to provide pupils with the necessary opportunities for listening, reading, writing, speaking and repeating the language. Their expectations are high. They share the objectives of their lessons with pupils at the start of a lesson, which usually motivates pupils. Teachers' class management is normally competent, their relationships with pupils generally very good. In addition to their consistent, native use of the target language, teachers also consciously incorporate all the four language skills in their lessons, offering opportunities to pupils for both variety and consolidation. Homework is set and marked, which motivates pupils and strengthens home-school links. Teachers nurture good relations in their lessons, which succeed in engendering a safe and supportive environment for pupils to experiment with a foreign language. They generally plan to address the challenges of involving pupils of varied abilities and aptitudes in their lessons.

171. Pupils' behaviour in both key stages is generally satisfactory. However, there is a noticeable difference in their attitude to French in the two key stages, with Key Stage 3 pupils being more positive than those in Key Stage 4. In Key Stage 3, very good behaviour and purposeful involvement in learning

are the norms, which suitably assist pupils' achievement. Their written work over time as well as their enthusiasm for spoken French observed in lessons reflect their commitment to the subject. In Key Stage 4, on the other hand, examples of disruptive behaviour by a few pupils in some lessons were noticed. This detracted from the focus of the lesson despite being well managed by the teacher.

172. Leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. The department has made improvements since the last inspection in 1998, including in its planning and delivery of the curriculum. After-school clubs, links to French speaking schools and residential trips to France make positive contributions to the French curriculum, enhancing pupils' progress and enjoyment. Procedures for assessing and monitoring pupils' attainment and progress are satisfactory. Homework is set and marked. National Curriculum requirements are met though some 15 per cent of pupils are disapplied from modern languages in order to pursue an alternative curriculum. There are no facilities for computer assisted work that could support the high proportion of pupils with special educational needs better.

## **MUSIC**

173. Music is currently not taught. There is no music teacher, nor has there been one for several years. This means the requirements of the National Curriculum are not met. The accommodation available for music is very good.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

174. By the end of Key Stage 3, few pupils are attaining standards in line with nationally expected levels for their age in games. However, standards in Years 7 and 8 are better. Boys exhibit a range of skills in rugby and volleyball, although not always accompanied by technical accuracy. Girls' perform skills well, when they practice them in pairs or small groups, but are not always able to reproduce them when playing team games.

175. Attainment at the end of KS4 is in line with nationally expected levels for their age. The recent involvement of pupils in GCSE and other certificate courses is helping to raise standards of performance in trampolining and other areas. Pupils' standards of written work is weak and teachers' strategies for marking and providing corrective feedback need further attention. Little use is made of computers to support pupils' learning. The number of girls taking GCSE is low.

176. Students with special educational needs make particularly good progress and attain appropriate standards. Teaching and management supports these pupils well. For example, the doubling up of staff when work experience changes the timetable and providing extra theory lessons for the GCSE group.

177. Most teaching is good and no unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Teachers have good knowledge of the activities they teach allied to accurate knowledge of their pupils, enabling them to promote realistic expectations. Lessons are well planned and sensitive challenge is evident in the good teaching. However, tasks given to some pupils in games lessons do not always match the level of skill pupils have. The department could do more to support the development of literacy skills through the writing and explanation of key words and specialist vocabulary. Teachers provide good role models and teamwork is evident. The opportunity to share individual teaching strategies needs developing further.

178. A small number of pupils take advantage of the opportunity to advance and refine their skills through the limited extra-curricular programme. Expansion in this area is difficult but it would further compliment the work of the department. The 'activities week' for all pupils in the summer enriches the curriculum and successfully draws on sporting expertise in the community.

179. Leadership and management are good. Since the last inspection there has been an improvement in the teaching and the Key Stage 4 curriculum. The use of good off-site facilities, extra staffing and the implementation of certificate courses have brought about a more focussed approach from the pupils. Almost all pupils now participate fully in physical education, reflecting the successful measures taken to improve participation since the last inspection. The curriculum is well planned and provides good coverage of National Curriculum requirements.

180. Although facilities are adequate shower facilities need updating and some areas of the gymnasium are in need of painting in order to present a stimulating environment. The root cause of flooding in the gymnasium, causing it to be out of action, still needs rectifying.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

181. Pupils' attainment is below the average set by the Kent Agreed Syllabus both at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Pupils cope quite well with Attainment Target 1, 'learning about religion', particularly in question/answer sessions, but are much less secure in responding to Attainment Target 2, 'learning from religion'. A Year 11 group argued strongly and sensibly on the pros and cons of the 'father' having any say in a girl friend's decision to end her pregnancy. However, a great deal of teacher guidance was required before they were able to write about the topic from the point of view either of the 'father' or of the pregnant girl. Again, from scrutiny of all books for one year 9 teaching group, when students studying 'wealth and poverty' wrote about the contrast between our wealth and third world poverty, only a few coped with assurance with the writing. Although Religious Education is timetabled for sixth formers, no work or teaching was seen as they were on work experience.

182. Pupils' achievement, the progress that they make, is good both within lessons and over the longer period of each key stage. Over a half of pupils seen have special educational needs and they responded well orally. Year 8 pupils know why Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday are so called and most are able to organise and complete their written work. The highest attainers write at length on topics such as Baptism and Marriage in Year 8, Wealth and Poverty in Year 9 and Abortion in Year 11. A Year 10 group responded maturely and sensibly to a discussion of 'Suffering' (earthquakes, floods, wars, drink driving) and were moved by the example of Roy Castle's death caused by passive smoking.

183. All teaching is satisfactory or better and 80 per cent is good or better. Teaching is characterised by good pace and variety as well as good planning. Exercise books are marked up to date with lots of positive comments and suggested targets for pupils. Pupils respond by keeping their books clean and tidy, clearly taking a pride in their work. Pupils' response to their lessons is satisfactory at both key stages and they are generally motivated, hardworking and remain on task throughout lessons.

184. The department contributes to raising the level of pupils' literacy by routinely correcting spellings and serious grammatical errors and by having key words on display in the classroom. Contributions to pupils' numeracy are limited to recording results of surveys. Little use is made of computers to support pupils' learning. Homework, appropriate to the range of attainment of the pupils, is set fortnightly for Key Stage 3 pupils, but not at Key Stage 4. Whilst some homework asks pupils to find things out, written work is more commonly set. Worksheets have been improved to meet the criticisms in the last report and there are now appropriate worksheets for all levels of pupils' attainment. Criticisms of the monitoring of standards of teaching have also been met. The head of department monitors and supports teaching and her work is regularly monitored by the head of humanities.

185. The school has been meeting the requirements of the Kent Agreed Syllabus. This has now been amended and schemes of work are now being further adjusted to match the new requirements. Religious Education contributes substantially to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.

186. The department enjoys strong leadership from a teacher, who is well qualified and experienced. The classroom used is spacious and well equipped and has a very good display of pupils' work. Funding is adequate for the variety of text-books and artefacts required. However, time available for the subject is 10 hours below the stipulated time in the Kent Agreed Syllabus at Key Stage 4 and 15 hours below at Key Stage 3.

## VOCATIONAL COURSES

187. GCSE results in business education in 2000 were well above average when compared to all schools for the proportions of pupils gaining an A\*-C or A\*-G grade. The average points score is also above the average for all schools. Boys generally performed better than girls. The attainment of sixth form students following the one-year vocational course in business was well above national average expectations in terms of both completion rates and the grades awarded. 90 per cent of the cohort successfully completed the course, with 40 per cent gaining merit or distinction grades.

188. The attainment of present GCSE students is in line with national expectations. All pupils are gaining a good understanding of business, learning about different types of costs and developing their basic knowledge of accounts. All pupils make good progress in lessons, including a large number who are designated as having special educational needs. These pupils are not always supported in lessons by learning support assistants and, where the support is lacking, their progress is slower, as is that of the other pupils.

189. During the inspection, no Year 12 lessons were observed because the students were undertaking their work experience placements. However, their written work shows that attainment is at least in line with national expectation. Modular test results already available are above average.

190. All vocational pupils, whether following the GCSE course, or the vocational options in the sixth form, are developing competent ICT skills and many are proficient users of word processing programmes.

191. The quality of teaching in vocational subjects is very good and such good quality teaching is having a beneficial impact on the quality of pupils' learning. All lessons were at least good and some very good. Key features are the quality of teachers' planning and their high expectations of pupils. All vocational pupils are set challenging tasks and there is an expectation that pupils will produce regular written answers that are in a prose form. All pupils are developing a sound basic knowledge of business and its applications. For example, Year 11 pupils understand that the growth of a firm is constrained by both internal and external factors. Higher attainers can identify such factors, categorise them and suggest ways in which the severity of the constraints might be reduced. Year 10 pupils are learning about types of costs and some can identify why some costs vary with the level of output while others remain constant. The emphasis on substantial writing and the care taken in explaining key words and terms is significantly aiding the literacy skills of all pupils.

192. The provision for vocational education is very well managed. The resources and accommodation are good and the assessment procedures used in the business orientated courses in both years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form are very good. Though vocational studies were not reported on at the previous inspection, some criticisms were made about the range of courses on offer. This criticism has, in part, been addressed. In Years 10 and 11 a building craft occupations course has been established. A small group of pupils follow options in bricklaying, plastering, carpentry and painting and decorating. It is very well tutored in excellent accommodation on the school site through formal links with Adult Education. It is an interesting enhancement to the curriculum that allows pupils to gain some practical skills. In the sixth form, the vocational provision has been increased by the availability of a vocational course in leisure and tourism. Vocational subjects have extended the school's curriculum and are allowing a significant number of pupils to gain qualifications outside the National Curriculum. It is also providing these pupils with enhanced prospects to progress to the next stage of their education, or to enter employment.



