INSPECTION REPORT

HOUGHTON KEPIER SCHOOL

Houghton-le-Spring

LEA area: Sunderland

Unique reference number: 108868

Headteacher: Mrs S Hyland

Reporting inspector: Ms J Jones
12460

Dates of inspection: 8th – 12th January 2001

Inspection number: 209571

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Dairy Lane Houghton-le-Spring Tyne & Wear
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Dr P D B Collins
Date of previous inspection:	11th January 1999

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
12460	Ms J Jones	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it? The school's results and pupils' achievements How well are pupils or students taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further?
90939	Mr B Eyre	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
3943	Mr D Innes	Team inspector	English	
18676	Mr R Meakin	Team inspector	Mathematics	
27050	Ms V Blackburn	Team inspector	Science	
31680	Mr P Redican	Team inspector	Art and design	
17359	Mr V Harrison	Team inspector	Design and technology	
13734	Mr H Davies	Team inspector	Geography	
30005	Mr P Legon	Team inspector	History	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils or students?
22966	Mr B Hodgson	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Physical education	
15396	Mr R Bulman	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
30128	Ms S Stanley	Team inspector	Music	
10807	Mr P Quest	Team inspector	Religious education	
30046	Mr R Parker	Team inspector	Equal opportunities Special educational needs English as an additional language	

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London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

There are 1345 pupils; approximately the same numbers of boys and girls. There are very few pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds and none at an early stage of acquiring English. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is above average at 34 per cent. There are 284 pupils on the register of special educational needs (broadly average). Of these, 25 have statements of special educational need; this is below average. There are 17 pupils from traveller families who attend the school for most of the school year.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an effective school. Standards are rising, teaching is good and leadership is very good. The school has high aims, suitable priorities and very good systems for caring for pupils and raising their aspirations. The school is well managed and gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- There is very strong leadership by the headteacher; senior managers, staff and governors are an effective team.
- Standards in work and behaviour have improved significantly since the previous inspection.
- Teaching and learning in most subjects are good.
- Standards in information and communication technology (ICT) are above average.
- There is very good provision for pupils with special educational needs and outstanding initiatives to ensure that pupils from different backgrounds benefit fully from their education.
- The school ensures that pupils' personal development and academic achievement are closely monitored and supported.
- Relationships at all levels are very good.

What could be improved

- The attainment of boys is lower than that of girls by more than the difference nationally.
- Although literacy is improving, there are still weaknesses in writing at length and spelling.
- Attendance, though improving, is below the national average.
- Management and standards in history are unsatisfactory.
- The library does not have enough books or other resources and is not used effectively outside lesson times.
- In spite of pupils' good computer skills, information and communication technology is not used widely enough by a number of subjects in the curriculum.

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 January 1999 when it was found to have serious weaknesses. The improvement in standards, both of attainment and behaviour, is very good and the school no longer has serious weaknesses. Pupils' attitudes to school are now positive and test and examination results, though still below average, are rising. The quality of teaching has improved significantly. The school has taken effective action on the issues identified in the previous inspection and there is now a well-established culture for learning in which pupils expect to work hard and respect those who do. The atmosphere in the school is optimistic and purposeful. The management team has been completely restructured and is now much more effective in leading the school and monitoring its effectiveness.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	E	E	D	C
A-levels/AS-levels				

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Test results at the age of 14 are rising in science and mathematics; science results in 2000 were close to the national average. Mathematics results are still below average, and in 2000, English results were well below average. Overall, the school does better than similar schools; although English scores are below this average, mathematics is above the similar schools average and science is well above. Pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations and GCSE and GNVQ results are rising broadly in line with the national trend. In spite of below average standards in Year 7, pupils gain above average GCSE grades in Spanish and information and communication technology and average levels in art and design. Grades in food technology and textiles are above average. Targets for grades in examinations at the age of 16 are securely based on rigorous assessment of pupils' work and in 2000, the school met its targets. There are ambitious but well-founded targets for 2001.

In work seen, pupils make good progress from a below-average starting point, and achievement in most subjects is good. In the current Year 9, pupils are working at levels close to average in most subjects, though they remain below average in English, mathematics and history. Attainment by the end of Year 11 is lower, mainly because these pupils have not had the benefit of improvements in teaching and learning throughout their time in school. There is underachievement in history but in all other subjects, pupils make at least satisfactory progress. In English, art and design, design and technology, modern languages and information and communication technology, pupils' achievement in all years is good. Standards in literacy are below average. Students can express themselves well when speaking but many do not write as clearly or spell accurately. Standards in numeracy are average. Pupils calculate accurately and use numerical and statistical information in science and geography.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Most pupils like school and enjoy lessons and other activities.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good in most lessons and usually around the school. Pupils respond well to the effective code of behaviour and the number of exclusions is falling steadily. There is some unsatisfactory behaviour in the library at lunchtime.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils get on well together and like and respect their teachers.
Attendance	Unsatisfactory. Most pupils come to school regularly but the attendance of a significant proportion, particularly in Year 10, is erratic. Some authorised absence is due to parents taking pupils away from school for holidays.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching and learning are good overall. In the inspection, teaching in 25 per cent of lessons was very good or excellent, in 42 per cent it was good and in 28 per cent it was satisfactory. Teaching was unsatisfactory in five per cent of lessons. There is little difference in the quality of teaching across the different years. Most of the unsatisfactory teaching was due to temporary teachers or those unfamiliar with their classes having to cover for absences at short notice. In most lessons, pupils learn well because teachers use resources well to engage and involve pupils. Pupils respond well to teachers' demands for high standards. Teaching in English and mathematics is good, with nearly a third of lessons in English being very good. Most science teaching is good but there is some unsatisfactory teaching when not enough is expected of lower attaining pupils. Teaching in design and technology and modern languages and in most other subjects is good. In information and communication technology, teaching is very good. Teaching is unsatisfactory in history where ineffective leadership does not give enough support to new teachers. In these lessons, teaching is superficial and pupils do not learn to evaluate and interpret historical information. There is, however, some very good history teaching. In modern languages, pupils of all levels of attainment learn to speak and write with confidence because lessons are lively, well planned and fun.

In all subjects, pupils are helped to improve their literacy by reading aloud and learning key technical words. However, there is no overall literacy policy to ensure that spelling is taught consistently or that pupils are encouraged to write at length. Numeracy is taught well in mathematics but there is no policy to ensure that all subjects contribute to pupils' ability to handle number. Teaching in modern languages, and particularly Spanish, is good and pupils respond well to the lively activities and opportunities to express themselves in another language. Pupils with special educational needs are well taught and make good progress. Pupils from travellers' families learn well because teachers understand and make good provision for their particular needs.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. Pupils follow the full range of National Curriculum subjects and religious education. They can study two languages. In Years 10 and 11, they have the option of taking three separate sciences and a small number of vocational courses. There is a very good range of sporting and other extra-curricular activities. Personal, social and health education is well planned to include effective sex education and suitable guidance about the misuse of drugs. Careers education and teaching about the world of work are well planned and supported through effective links with the local community. There are good links with further education colleges and teacher training institutions and satisfactory links with local primary schools. The curriculum meets statutory requirements except that in some subjects, pupils do not use computers enough and the school does not hold a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. Pupils are well supported by additional lessons in basic skills and through the help of learning support assistants in lessons. Teachers are given effective guidance for supporting these pupils and helping them reach their targets.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. There are good opportunities for pupils to develop social skills and spiritual development is encouraged in assemblies and tutorials. Provision for cultural development is satisfactory but pupils are not fully prepared for life in a multicultural society. There is very good provision for pupils to learn about and practise principles of right and wrong.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. The school is a safe and pleasant environment for learning. Pupils' personal development and progress in lessons are central to all the school does. There are very good procedures for checking that pupils are making the progress they are capable of and for helping them if they fall behind. Pupils' personal development is monitored effectively. Form tutors and heads of year provide good help and advice about personal and academic matters. Effective systems ensure that requirements for child protection are met.

The school has good links with parents and is supported by an enthusiastic parent-teacher association. Pupils' planners are used efficiently to communicate with home, and parents are kept well informed of their children's progress through good quality annual reports and interim progress reports.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher and an enthusiastic senior management team have established a culture in which the school's motto, 'Nothing but the best will do', has real meaning. Clear educational direction is supported by effective management systems that include many opportunities for all staff to reflect on what they do and look for ways to improve. The management sets high targets for improvement based on realistic appraisal of strengths and weaknesses.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors have a good grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses and are very effective in working with the school to see that planning is successful in raising standards. Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has very good systems for monitoring and evaluating what it does. Senior managers make very good use of information from test and examination results to identify weaknesses such as the attainment of boys. Action to improve weaknesses is well considered and its effectiveness evaluated.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes good use of resources overall; senior managers are continually evaluating the use of staff, resources and accommodation. Accommodation has some shortcomings and there are good plans for improvement. Teachers and other staff are generally well used but in a number of subjects, classes are shared by one or more teachers and this makes learning more difficult for these groups. The school makes very good use of all grants for particular initiatives and uses up-to-date electronic equipment very well to make the best use of information. There are generally enough teachers and other staff to meet the requirements of the curriculum but the school is at present using a number of temporary staff to cover long-term staff absences. Accommodation and resources are adequate in most respects. There is a severe shortage of books and other resources in the library. The school applies the principles of best value when buying resources or services.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
• The school has high expectations. • There has been a big improvement since the current headteacher took over. • There are many activities for their children outside lesson time. • Pupils with special educational needs are given very good help and support.	• Although behaviour has improved, there is still some unsatisfactory behaviour in mixed ability classes. • A significant minority who replied to the questionnaire are not satisfied with the amount of work pupils do at home. • Some parents feel they do not get enough information and that the school does not work closely enough with parents.

Inspectors agreed with the things parents like. They found behaviour is generally good and the little unsatisfactory behaviour is not necessarily a feature of mixed ability classes. The amount of homework varies but is generally satisfactory. Inspectors judged that the school works closely with parents – reports are good and the school recently surveyed all parents on important issues.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

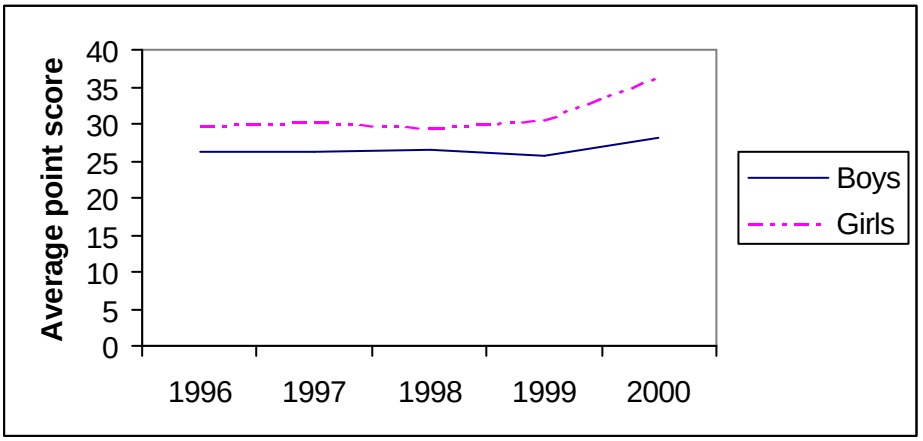
The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. It was not possible to see any lessons in Year 11 during the inspection because these pupils were all sitting examinations that week. Instead, inspectors judged the attainment of the year group by looking at their books, coursework and examination papers and by discussions with groups of these pupils.

2. Test results overall in English, mathematics and science by 14-year-olds were below average in 2000. There was considerable variation between the subjects; English results were well below average, mathematics results were below average and science results were broadly in line with the national average. However, results indicate good achievement by this group of pupils because their attainment when they started in Year 7 was well below average. In all three subjects, girls' results are better than boys' by more than the national difference. The lower results in English were due mainly to the poorer performance by boys. The trend in results over the last three years is upwards but by slightly less than the national trend. This is again due to English, in which test results have not shown the same improvement as mathematics or science.

3. Test results compare more favourably with those of schools where pupils have a similar social background. English results are below this average but mathematics results are in line with the average and science results are well above.

4. GCSE and GNVQ results are below average but show a steady improvement over the last three years, with a significant rise in 2000. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE grades A* to C rose from 27 per cent in 1999 to 32 per cent in 2000. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more grade A* to G is well above the average for similar schools. The overall point score* is close to those of pupils in similar schools, and reflects the lower than average number of pupils who achieve the highest grades of A* and A. The strongest subjects at GCSE are information and communication technology and Spanish, where results are above average, and art and design where results are close to the national average. Results in food technology, where girls predominate, are good. In 2000, 62 per cent achieved grades A* to C.



* where A*=8, A=7, B=6, C=5, D=4, E=3, F=2, G=1.

5. The graph shows boys' and girls' average point scores in GCSE from 1996 to 2000. While girls' results show a significant rise, boys' scores are only improving slightly. The differences in the performance of boys and girls are carefully monitored.

6. Generally, the attainment of pupils in the current Years 7, 8 and 9 is higher than that of the group of pupils who took the tests in 2000, although still below average. They make good progress in most subjects so that overall, their attainment is average by the end of Year 9.

7. In spite of good progress in most lessons in Years 10 and 11, standards are below average at the end of Year 11. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 have benefited from improvements since the previous inspection in teaching and in the ethos for learning but there has not been long enough for them to recover the lost ground from the earlier years.

8. In work seen during the inspection, standards are at least in line with test and examination results, and in a number of subjects are higher than this. Generally, by the end of Year 9, pupils are working at levels close to the national average in all but English and design and technology. This indicates good achievement and is a reflection of the effort the school has put into improving pupils' progress over the last two years.

9. Standards of literacy are improving but pupils' written work is still let down by inaccurate spelling of familiar words. In nearly all subject areas, teachers emphasise the key words in the subject and ask pupils to spell these correctly. The spelling mistakes, however, are often in commonplace words such as 'therefore' and 'friend'. The mistakes are seen in all years across the ability range. Even higher attainers sometimes use 'to' instead of 'too'.

10. Standards in numeracy are closely linked to standards in mathematics. Overall, pupils' skills with number are satisfactory and sufficient in most cases for them to be able to cope with the basic mathematics needed in such subjects as geography and science. In one science lesson, however, pupils had difficulty with the necessary algebra. The school recognises the need to consolidate pupils' numeracy skills through a policy across the whole school and has built this into the school development plan for next year.

11. In English, achievement is good because most pupils now make good progress in lessons in all years. However, pupils have suffered from the lack of continuity in the English department where almost all the teachers have changed in the last two years. The department is now stable and starting to raise standards. Boys make slower progress at consolidating their knowledge so that though they often work hard in lessons, they do not remember the work well when it comes to tests and examinations.

12. Achievement in mathematics is satisfactory overall. Although girls' results are generally higher than boys', there is little difference in their attitudes to lessons and boys are often more eager than girls to offer ideas and answer questions.

13. In science, pupils make good progress in Years 7 to 9 and have acquired an appropriate body of new knowledge by the time they reach the end of Year 9. In Years 10 and 11, most make satisfactory progress though the wide spread of ability among the group taking three separate sciences makes it difficult for teachers to pitch the work at the right level for all these pupils.

14. Pupils make good progress in relation to standards when they start in Year 7 in information and communication technology, art and design, design and technology and modern foreign languages. They enjoy practical work, whether it is designing, drawing, making, using computers or speaking a new language.

15. Achievement is satisfactory in music overall. In Years 10 and 11, the small group of pupils studying for GCSE work hard and make good progress and in Years 7 to 9, pupils make satisfactory progress, particularly in the practical aspects of composing and performing.

16. In geography, progress is satisfactory in the GCSE groups and good in Years 7 to 9 when all study the subject. Achievement in physical education is satisfactory in all years and pupils build on the skills developed year by year.

17. In history, there is a significant element of underachievement, particularly by boys in Years 7 to 9. This is due to weak leadership over a long period. Pupils' work is not assessed accurately and lessons are not planned to enable pupils to build up their knowledge of historical events or develop the ability to look critically at historical information.

18. In religious education, pupils make good progress in Years 7 to 9 to reach average standards by the end of Year 9. In Years 10 and 11, progress is satisfactory. The difference is due to a higher proportion of good teaching in the earlier years.

19. Twenty-one per cent of pupils are registered as having special educational needs. This figure does not reflect the full extent of the difficulties which pupils bring to the school. Over the last three years, half of the new entrants have not developed skills in reading normally expected in a twelve-year-old. In addition, a significant number of pupils have learning difficulties that were not identified before they came to the school.

20. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Those who are withdrawn from lessons for intensive help with their reading make steady gains in skills and confidence. Within their lessons, pupils with special educational needs make good progress, particularly when a support assistant helps them. In some subjects such as English and modern foreign languages, they are able to make good progress without extra support because the work is carefully adapted to meet their needs.

21. Pupils from travellers' families make good progress in all subjects because they are given effective support. They are given work to do while they are away and helped to settle back and catch up when they return.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

22. Since the previous inspection, pupils' behaviour and attitudes to work have improved significantly and their personal development is good.

23. The school is a much calmer place, the number of exclusions has plummeted and it is confidently predicted that it will reduce further because of the very good help the school gives pupils who find it difficult to conform to school rules. In the classroom, pupils usually work hard and remain attentive although a few become restless towards the end of lessons.

24. In the older year groups, boys are sometimes less committed than girls, and written work is often untidy and sometimes sparse. However, this is less apparent among younger pupils, particularly those in Years 8 and 9. In a Year 9 food technology lesson,

the boys were working with great care and precision to make sausage rolls to commercial standard. In a Year 8 geography lesson, a lower attaining group with more boys than girls, all pupils worked hard to understand and complete a worksheet about farming needs; the boys were very keen to answer questions and their writing was as neat and careful as the girls'. Some Year 7 boys find settling to work more difficult than girls and lack their sense of purpose. This was seen in a Year 7 science lesson where boys were generally more chatty than girls and needed more reminders from the teacher to finish tasks. In all years, boys try hard in modern language lessons and respond to oral work without embarrassment.

25. There is a harmonious atmosphere where pupils feel comfortable studying and learning. Movement around the school is orderly, all pupils mix freely and easily. However, behaviour in the library at lunchtimes is unsatisfactory.

26. There are no incidents of sexist or racist behaviour and the principles of tolerance and understanding are promoted well.

27. Pupils with special educational needs respond well to the support that they are given. They are co-operative and enjoy their work because the help is carefully planned and helps them to succeed. They often maintain their concentration longer than other pupils in the class. Older pupils in particular are appreciative of the help that they are given and the special arrangements, such as the availability of a 'refuge' where they can work, usually with help if they have difficulty in a particular lesson. This prevents them becoming involved in potentially distracting situations where they might find it difficult to cope and behave well. Pupils from traveller families settle in again quickly after prolonged absences and are well integrated into the life of the school.

28. Attendance is unsatisfactory. Although most pupils attend regularly, a significant minority do not. During the previous inspection it was noted that the majority of poor attendance occurred amongst the lower achieving pupils. This is still true. A study of the attendance figures for the autumn term confirms that too many parents are lax in providing the school with reasons for absence. Across the school, approximately one pupil in four has an attendance figure below 90 per cent. The poor attendance of some pupils affects others because lessons slow down when teachers have to go over work to help everyone to catch up. Punctuality has improved since the last inspection.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

29. There has been a big improvement in teaching since the previous inspection. At that time, over one in ten lessons, mainly in Years 7 to 9, were unsatisfactory. Now, 19 out of 20 lessons are at least satisfactory and around one-third are good or better. A high proportion (one-quarter) of the lessons observed on this latest inspection was very good or excellent.

30. There were several teachers absent during the inspection and some of their classes were taught by temporary teachers or by teachers who had not taught these classes before. This was the cause of most of the nine unsatisfactory lessons seen. Improvement is due in part to staff changes; nearly a quarter of the teachers are new since the previous inspection. The school's policy of observing teachers and supporting them with suitable training has also had a big impact.

31. The best teaching seen during the inspection was in English, mathematics, art and design, information and communication technology, modern languages and design and technology. In all these subjects, there was no unsatisfactory teaching and in over half the lessons, teaching was good or better. In these lessons, pupils learn well, acquiring

knowledge and developing skills with interest and enthusiasm. Personal, social and health education is also well taught. The teaching seen was always at least good and in half the lessons observed, it was very good. Teachers have a very good rapport with their pupils. This allows them to lead discussions in which pupils talk about sensitive topics such as puberty and drugs with maturity. Teachers manage lessons well by providing a framework for orderly learning in which pupils listen to each other with empathy and respect.

32. Evidence from pupils' work and from their results indicates good teaching in geography. This was less evident during the inspection because two permanent teachers of geography were absent and a number of lessons were covered by other teachers. Work in pupils' books, however, is lively, relevant and well marked.

33. The weakest teaching is in history, where the long-term absence of a head of department, coupled with a succession of temporary teachers, are having a serious effect on pupils' learning. In unsatisfactory lessons, teachers are not well prepared, and often use unsuitable material such as outdated texts. In spite of this, there is some very good history teaching. There is an urgent need to improve the way the history department is run in order to bring all the teaching up to the standard of the best.

34. Unsatisfactory lessons have a number of features:

- The teacher's knowledge of the topic being taught is not sufficient. This was seen in history where the teacher had not checked the key dates which were the focus of the lesson.
- In some cases, the teacher talks for too long without involving pupils so that their learning is passive.
- The teacher does not use the school's behaviour policy effectively and a significant minority pay little attention and spoil the learning for others.

35. In most lessons, teachers plan carefully and often make very good use of resources. In modern languages, pupils are able to concentrate and learn effectively throughout hour-long lessons because teachers move seamlessly between activities using audiotapes, worksheets and overhead projectors, alternating this with short, well-chosen individual and class tasks. In a Year 7 textiles lesson, the teacher used a variety of examples to show pupils how to dye fabric before helping them to prepare their own materials. This careful introduction made sure all pupils, including a number with special educational needs, knew the techniques and possibilities before they started so that they were quick and creative once they began their own projects. In a Year 10 child development lesson, pupils responded well to a carefully planned lesson involving effective use of a video clip, well focused explanations and questions and informative worksheets. Pupils showed from their questions and answers how well their understanding of the way children develop is increasing.

36. There are a few occasions when teachers use strategies for raising the boys' attainment. In English, the department is experimenting with grouping and seating to encourage boys to develop more confidence, and in science, teachers often deliberately choose boys to answer questions and insist on them speaking in full sentences. Elsewhere, though pupils are supported individually, there is little evidence of boys being targeted in this way.

37. Teachers' expectations are usually high, both of work and behaviour. In a Year 9 science lesson designed to improve pupils' ability to think and question, the teacher gave them a very demanding piece of work to enable them to identify different rock

samples. Pupils had to interpret and classify a large amount of information using their recollection of work done the year before as well as textbooks. The teacher guided them very skilfully, rarely telling them the answers. She questioned them to make them think hard, resolve apparent contradictions and make discoveries for themselves. By the end of the lesson, pupils could confidently identify rock samples and relate their appearance to the way they had been formed.

38. The school has an effective system for encouraging pupils to behave well and most teachers use this successfully. Some teachers new to the school do not use the prescribed warnings early enough in the lesson and behaviour is then less good. Usually, however, teachers manage pupils well because they interest them and engage them. Teachers make the objectives for the lesson clear to pupils at the outset so that pupils know what they have to achieve and whether they are doing so. Good review sessions at the end of lessons help teachers and pupils to see how effective the learning has been.

39. Specialised teaching for pupils with reading difficulties is good. The well planned programme combines gradual development of the sounds which are the building blocks of reading; they then work with books that are selected to provide an appropriate challenge; and each session includes a chance to become more familiar with key words from different subjects. The work is varied and intensive so that pupils concentrate for the entire half-hour session and they are confident within well-established routines. The very good provision would be improved further if pupils' progress were measured more frequently in order to judge when to stop withdrawing them for intensive help. There are also some problems when these pupils return to their original classes because they take time to settle and sometimes find it difficult to catch up with the work that they have missed.

40. The team of special needs teachers and support assistants is very good at helping pupils with special educational needs to manage their work in other lessons. They stay close to the pupils with the greatest need and watch their progress very carefully. They anticipate difficulties and intervene to provide information or direct attention. They prompt and question so that these pupils develop their skills and understanding alongside the others in the class. This leads to situations such as the drama lesson, where the best demonstration of a new technique was given by a boy with a statement of special educational needs. He had practised with another pupil, under the watchful eye of his support assistant.

41. Other pupils benefit from the effective help from support assistants because the staff methodically scan the needs of all those in the class with identified special needs.

42. Most subject teachers give good support to pupils with special educational needs. They know both the pupils and their needs well and they are constantly aware of opportunities to ask these pupils questions they will be able to answer in class to build the pupils' self-esteem. Teachers in most subjects have developed a range of strategies to allow pupils of all abilities to understand concepts and develop skills in spite of the particular difficulties that they have with learning. Occasionally, there is insufficient control of unsatisfactory behaviour and the requirements of pupils with special educational needs are not met, even when specific additional support is provided.

43. Teachers are beginning to identify pupils with particular gifts and talents and ensure that they are sufficiently challenged in lessons. For example, in a science lesson on thinking skills, the teacher set a written task that could be completed quite simply but

also gave pupils with a particularly good grasp of the ideas the opportunity to write at greater depth.

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

44. The curriculum was found to be satisfactory at the time of the previous inspection, and in view of the many more important improvements needed, the senior management wisely left it broadly unchanged.

45. The curriculum covers all subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education. In addition, there is a very good programme of personal, social and health education. In Year 7, there is a well-planned programme to improve the reading and writing skills of the weakest pupils, though a strengthening of links with local primary schools to find out what pupils already know, would further improve this. This is an improvement since the previous inspection, as is the developing programme to raise the level of achievement of gifted and talented pupils. These are now identified and subject departments provide them with more challenging work as well as suitable extra-curricular activities. In English, there is a special book club for them. The school plans to use the Excellence in Cities funding to provide these pupils with additional teaching.

46. All pupils have the opportunity to study a second foreign language but this is at the expense of reduced time for physical education. At present there is insufficient time for all pupils in Years 8 and 9 to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum fully. This reduction, together with an inadequate allocation of time for drama, restricts the take-up for these subjects at GCSE. Pupils with special educational needs follow the normal curriculum and receive suitable additional support, both in lessons and by withdrawal from them. There is at present no programme to teach numeracy within a range of subjects, or, for example, to ensure that pupils' algebra is sufficiently advanced to ensure that they can cope with the demands made in science. There is no overarching literacy policy. This prevents pupils from making the best use of efforts by most departments to teach pupils to use and write key words in the subject correctly. Although pupils are learning the technical vocabularies, most do not write fluently at length or spell non-technical words accurately.

47. In Years 10 and 11, pupils continue to follow Programmes of Study in accordance with the full National Curriculum and the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. All pupils follow the basic curriculum and a particular strength is the opportunity for all pupils to take at least one foreign language to GCSE level. There is a small number of successful GNVQ courses in business education and engineering. The school is rightly considering providing additional GNVQ subjects open to all pupils. A few pupils who are considered to be unlikely to complete their full-time education successfully have a well-organised day off-site where external trainers teach them. A particularly useful aspect of their course is the element focusing on personal development and key skills for employability.

48. The school has an effective programme to equip all pupils for the world of work. The programme of personal, social and health education includes, from Year 9 upward, work on understanding industry and the economy. From Year 7, all pupils receive careers education. In Year 10, there is a good module that includes mock interviews supported by the Wearside Business and Education Council. There is valuable advice from the local careers service and two weeks' work experience for all pupils. There are well-planned visits to local businesses and industrial sites and outside speakers widen pupils' knowledge of careers through talks about employment and employability. All

pupils develop the skills of problem solving and teamwork in many lessons and particularly in science, technology, mathematics and English.

49. There is a wide programme of extra-curricular activities, with a number of visits abroad and a good range of sporting activities. Pupils in Year 11 have the opportunity to attend a number of revision classes to improve their prospects for academic success. Significant numbers of senior pupils achieve awards in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme.

50. There are some minor weaknesses in this otherwise good curriculum:

- While the use of computers in subjects other than information and communication technology is growing, there is a need to ensure that all subject departments include the appropriate use of computers in order to meet fully the requirements in those subjects. At present there is, for example, very little datalogging in science.
- There is insufficient time allowed in Years 7 to 9 for some courses such as physical education and drama.
- At present, there are a number of classes in several subjects that are taught by more than one teacher. This number should be reduced in order to improve the learning experiences for pupils and thus increase their standards of attainment.

51. The overall provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good and has improved since the previous inspection. Some subjects have policies and include provision in their lesson plans. The school seeks to cultivate spiritual development in a number of ways. A carefully planned programme of assemblies provides a range of opportunities for pupils to reflect on matters of spiritual and moral value. Assemblies are also used to set a positive atmosphere in which praise is used to encourage and reward good work. Tutors are encouraged to use 'Thought for the Day' in registration. This is based on the assembly theme for the week. This is coupled with a 'Diary of Reflection' when pupils are encouraged to write down their own responses to various personal statements. During the inspection, these opportunities were not consistently used. Whilst some tutors made good use of the material, others did not. The school does not meet the requirement to hold a daily act of worship for all pupils.

52. Spiritual development is reinforced in such subjects as religious education and English, where pupils are encouraged, through the use of poetry, to consider their own responses to sensitive topics and relate them to the work of poets such as Sylvia Plath. In geography, pupils are given the opportunity to consider the beauty of the natural landscape and to reflect upon the awe and wonder that is found in phenomena such as volcanoes.

53. A strong emphasis on personal responsibility underpins the school's approach to moral education. There is a clearly understood framework of values. The school carefully monitors any incidents of poor behaviour and is quick to involve the whole community in supporting pupils. Principles that help pupils distinguish right from wrong are reinforced in several subjects that provide opportunities for pupils to look at contemporary moral issues. A good example was seen in religious education where Year 10 pupils were carefully examining the subject of family life and marriage. In geography, issues such as the moral problems surrounding population control are considered.

54. There are opportunities for social development throughout the school. Pupils are often encouraged to work in pairs and groups. An active school council considers a variety of issues and takes the initiative in promoting charity work. During the inspection, a group of pupils were busy collecting for the NSPCC. A prefect system enables Year 11 pupils

to be actively involved in school duties, whilst younger pupils have opportunities to take responsibility in such things as duties in the school foyer. Older pupils are encouraged to become mentors for younger pupils and many help out in paired reading exercises.

55. The provision for cultural development, particularly in English, music and art, is good. Pupils are also learning something of other cultures from their help with local asylum seekers. However, there is little in the curriculum to help pupils understand the multicultural nature of our society. A wide range of extra-curricular activities, including trips to European countries and visiting linguists, widen pupils' horizons. Religious education includes material from all the major religions that are represented in our culture, and both art and music draw examples from across the world.

56. The curriculum for pupils with special educational needs includes a wide range of additional support, tailored to meet the different needs of all kinds of pupils. The best feature of this support is that it is so closely focused. Those with severe reading difficulties are withdrawn for one kind of additional support; those whose reading simply lags behind some of their other skills are supported in lessons in other ways such as through help from support assistants and simplified work. The best and worst reader are given different kinds of additional access to reading, either graded books to carry in their bags for the odd moment, or access to an out-of-class club, to develop a more advanced repertoire of reading skills.

57. The school is in the process of systematically identifying gifted and talented pupils. While this provision is at an early stage, a number of pupils have already benefited from a number of initiatives:

- Some attend masterclasses in mathematics, sports, languages and music.
- Four Year 10 pupils sit on the Sunderland Youth Parliament.
- A group of Year 9 modern foreign language pupils worked with the local authority to set up a bilingual version of its web site.

58. Overall, the curriculum for pupils in Years 10 and 11 provides them with a good choice of academic and vocational subjects. Academic subjects such as three separate sciences and a second modern language are complemented by successful vocational courses such as child development, business education and engineering, though the number of GNVQ courses is low at present.

59. A small number of pupils in Year 10 are following a course in GNVQ business studies. This is well planned and pupils already have a good grasp of business language and terminology and have the ability to understand new ideas such as the concept of stakeholding.

60. There are a variety of alternative courses that make the curriculum appropriate for particular groups of pupils aged 14 to 16. Primarily, these courses help pupils who are in danger of exclusion to stay in touch with their schooling. Selected pupils go out of school for specific training leading to a profile of achievement which records their achievements in key skills; some of this work will contribute towards an NVQ qualification in 'Working with Others'. The programme includes group activities and outdoor pursuits as well as an element of planning before the visits and a range of other activities designed to build self-esteem and add to their individual curriculum vitae. These pupils also have access to the refuge room for individual support if they feel that they are losing control of their behaviour in other lessons.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

61. Arrangements to ensure the health, safety and welfare of pupils are good. There are successful procedures for promoting good behaviour and there is a very good system for supporting pupils' development and to assess their progress. Inconsistencies identified in the last report have been eliminated.

62. The school has an effective code of conduct and its rules are well understood by the pupils; they are fully aware of the consequences of their actions. During the previous inspection, many pupils were disruptive or restless and had to be continually reminded about what was required of them. The actions taken by the school have effectively calmed the situation. When pupils have to be removed from a lesson, they are encouraged to think about their behaviour and given a chance to return to the lesson and redeem themselves. There is a harmonious atmosphere where pupils feel comfortable studying and learning. Movement around the school is orderly, all pupils mix freely and easily. However, behaviour in the library at lunchtimes is unsatisfactory.

63. Child protection procedures are fully implemented. They include staff training and arrangements to ensure that new teachers are made aware of both the policy and the way incidents are reported. First aid is satisfactory and pupils who become unwell during the day are treated with sensitivity, in spite of the current lack of a dedicated treatment room. Members of staff have undergone appropriate training to ensure that pupils with specific medical conditions are cared for properly.

64. The way the school assesses pupils' work has improved significantly since the previous inspection when there were wide variations in practice. It was then found to be difficult to assess what pupils knew when they entered the school, and across the school, information about assessment (in subjects other than English, mathematics and science) was limited. This weakness has been dealt with very effectively. In almost every subject it is now possible to make confident predictions about the number of pupils capable of achieving each grade in GCSE examinations and the school is developing plans to give gifted and talented pupils suitably challenging work in all lessons.

65. Effective assessment is closely linked to the school's very good systems for monitoring pupils' academic progress and personal development. Heads of year, department heads and form tutors have a good overview of pupils' progress. This is matched to good records of test results and information about how well each pupil should be doing. Teachers quickly see whether an individual pupil is underachieving. When this happens, teachers meet with parents and decide to mentor, advise or reprimand as appropriate.

66. The assessment of pupils with special educational needs is good. Pupils are tested when they enter the school and those who get extra support are tested after a period of time to see how effective it has been. Teachers assess some aspects of the learning more frequently but they are not yet able to assess small improvements in reading skills. It is difficult to judge when to stop taking pupils out of lessons for extra help. Pupils themselves do not know how quickly they are improving and do not get specific feedback on how well they have done from lesson to lesson.

67. Since the previous report, there has been very good improvement in provision for pupils with special educational needs. The school follows the code of practice in identifying these pupils and fulfils its duty to ensure that the provision outlined in individual statements is provided. Lesson plans contain detailed information to enable teachers to give them work appropriate for their needs. Pupils' progress is evaluated at

99. There is a dedicated space for pupils to be given help with reading difficulties and a quiet space within the library.

100. There have been substantial changes and improvements in the teaching and support staff since the previous inspection. The school has sufficient teachers and learning assistants to teach the curriculum and the staff has an appropriate range of qualifications and experience. The recent high turnover of staff, with 19 teachers leaving over the past two years, has resulted in good appointments and significant improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, particularly in English. The appointment of younger staff, including some newly qualified teachers, has increased the range of age and experience. The school has made a substantial investment of time and money in increasing the effectiveness of senior managers, subject leaders and pastoral heads. Members of the senior management team are now given time to manage effectively. Most subjects are well taught by full-time, suitably qualified specialists. Most teaching by the minority of part-time staff and non-specialists is good. Learning is sometimes less effective where teaching is done by two different teachers, or where, as in history, there is not enough support for new teachers within the department.

101. The number, qualifications and experience of support staff have improved in the last two years. The amount and quality of learning support for pupils with special educational needs have been beneficially increased. Subjects using technical assistance such as science, design and technology and information and communication technology are adequately staffed. In languages, teachers work in close co-operation with language assistants but receive insufficient help with the maintenance of equipment and the production of visual aids. The unsatisfactory staffing of the library over time has led to the current lack of development and the poor use made of this facility.

102. The governing body and senior management encourage and support professional development in line with the school's aims. Teachers and managers make very good, cost-effective use of training provided by the local authority, examination boards and other agencies in their drive to raise standards. The entire staff is involved in training dealing with agreed priorities such as raising boys' achievement. Newcomers to the school, including newly qualified teachers, are very well inducted and supported, apart from the weakness in history. Strong links with local universities and the initial training in school of student teachers add to the general level of professional awareness.

103. The governors have a wide range of experience and use this well to the school's benefit. They work closely with the school and understand the school's strengths and areas for development very well. They play a full part in making decisions and question the headteacher and senior managers closely about the school's results and initiatives.

104. Financial control and school administration are good. In assessing efficiency and effectiveness, the school makes very good use of information to compare itself with other schools and is aware of the standards it should be achieving in test and examination results. Equally careful attention is given to achieving the best value in its ordering of resources and contracts for services. Resources are used well and effective use is being made of new technology.

105. The leadership seeks best value in all its decisions by:

- comparing its performance with the results of other schools and in consulting parents and pupils about what it does;
- reviewing and questioning its work;
- consulting widely before taking decisions about buying resources or services.

106. Expenditure is closely monitored by the finance manager and by the governors' finance and general purposes sub-committee. Governors are very effective in tracking school expenditure, formulating the budget and acting as a critical friend to the school. Specific grants for special educational needs and other funding are very efficiently allocated and spent on the purposes for which they are intended. The school responds quickly and positively to recommendations following external audits of its systems and finances. The last audit was in November 2000 and although the school awaits the formal local authority report, several of the recommendations raised by the auditor have already been put in place or are well in line to be completed. The school is providing good value for money.

107. Additional time was provided during the inspection to report in detail on the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 and at modern languages. Additional detail is included in the body of the report.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

In order to improve further the quality of educational provision and educational standards achieved in the school, the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- Improve the attainment of boys by pursuing initiatives already started to find out why boys achieve less well than girls and formulate an action plan to raise boys' attainment. (Paragraphs 2, 17, 84, 96, 109, 110, 128, 125, 127, 135, 136, 140, 151, 163, 175, 182, 212)

- Write and implement a policy for improving literacy across the whole school. (Paragraphs 46, 122)

- Take steps to impress upon parents the importance of ensuring that their children attend school, and discourage them from taking their children away from school for holidays during term time. (Paragraph 28)

- Improve standards in history by improving management and leadership in the subject and providing effective guidance for new teachers in the department. (Paragraphs 33, 89, 100, 181)

- Improve the library by:

    - increasing the number of books and other resources in the library across all subjects; (Paragraphs 25, 26, 62, 97, 159)
    - providing effective supervision in the library out of lesson times to bring the standard of behaviour there up to the level seen elsewhere in the school. (Paragraphs 26, 101)

- Give all pupils the opportunity to apply the full range of ICT skills across the curriculum, in accordance with the requirements of the latest National Curriculum by:

    - ensuring that all subjects have sufficient and frequent access to computers;
    - enabling all teachers to follow ICT training provided through national funding as soon as possible;
    - ensuring that all teaching schemes include the appropriate use of computers in their lesson plans. (Paragraphs 133, 152, 170, 187, 202, 237)

Other issues

- Improve the quality of departmental planning so that all reach the standard of the best. (Paragraph 83)
- Establish and implement a strategy to teach numeracy throughout the curriculum. (Paragraph 134)
- Increase the opportunities to study vocational courses in Years 10 and 11. (Paragraphs 47, 58, 169)
- Increase the time for physical education in Years 8 and 9. (Paragraph 229)
- Refine the way the timetable is organised to reduce the number of classes who have more than one teacher for the same course. (Paragraphs 100, 146)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	172
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	53

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	23	42	28	5	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7– Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1345
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	457

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	25
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	284

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	9

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	33
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	40

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.1
National comparative data	5.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.5
National comparative data	0.8

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2000	136	111	247

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	47	64	72
	Girls	73	64	62
	Total	120	128	134
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	49 (51)	52 (54)	54 (46)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	11 (24)	26 (24)	26 (16)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	45	59	49
	Girls	62	64	50
	Total	107	123	99
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	43 (49)	50 (52)	40 (46)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	40 (46)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	14 (15)	26 (27)	13 (16)
	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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	2000	116	129	245

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	30	105	107
	Girls	49	124	127
	Total	79	229	234
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	32 (27)	93 (86)	96 (95)
	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	32.2
	National	38.4

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	33	82.5
	National		N/a

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	1
Indian	0
Pakistani	8
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	3
White	1335
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	122	5
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	74.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	18

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	12
Total aggregate hours worked per week	287

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	70.7

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24.9
Key Stage 4	24.5

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000

	£
Total income	3,076,982
Total expenditure	3,112,396
Expenditure per pupil	2,320
Balance brought forward from previous year	186,869
Balance carried forward to next year	141,227

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1335
Number of questionnaires returned	343

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	30	53	10	3	3
My child is making good progress in school.	34	59	5	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	17	52	15	3	13
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	57	15	5	2
The teaching is good.	19	68	8	0	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	20	59	15	4	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	42	48	7	1	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	55	41	2	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	16	58	16	3	7
The school is well led and managed.	24	57	7	2	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	27	61	5	2	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	31	52	5	1	10

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

ENGLISH

108. Standards of pupils' work have risen since the last inspection but remain below national averages. The improvement results from good teaching and learning and the positive relationships which now exist between teachers and pupils.

109. Results of national tests taken by pupils aged 14 in the year 2000 were well below average and below the average for similar schools. The trend of improvement in results has been below the national trend. Girls have consistently attained more highly than boys than is the case nationally. The school attributes last year's lower test results to the considerable staff changes in the English department over the last two years.

110. In the GCSE examinations in English, the proportion of pupils gaining grade C or higher was below average but matched national levels for those gaining grades A* to G. The trend of improvement by both measures over the last three years has been well above the national trend. Girls have continued to outperform boys by a significant margin. Results in English literature in 2000 were below average and below the average of earlier years when a much smaller proportion was entered. Results in drama and media studies were well below average because these courses were provided by the school mainly for lower attaining pupils. All pupils are now taking courses in English literature and pupils from the full range of ability now take courses in drama and media studies to GCSE.

111. The standard of work of pupils aged 14 seen during the inspection is below expectation for pupils of this age but is better than expected at the time of their entry to the school. This improvement results from the positive attitudes to learning which pupils develop in response to good teaching. This was clearly illustrated in a Year 9 class considering how to design a stage to emphasise the evil qualities of the witches in 'Macbeth' where very good teaching and the eagerness of pupils to learn led to very good progress. At entry, although pupils represent the full range of attainment and some are of very high ability, most are below average. Especially in classes of the youngest pupils, there is evidence of surprisingly different levels of learning and understanding gained from the literacy hour now being taught in primary schools. This was clearly evident, for example in the work of classes of pupils who entered the school in each of the last two years where many needed to be taught features of writing and important technical terms which should have been learned earlier. Lack of a shared background of experience sometimes slows the progress of some pupils who already have skills which classmates lack.

112. Pupils listen carefully to teachers and to their classmates when they are able to hear them and see their faces. Some pupils speak indistinctly and there are problems of organising seating for class discussion in some classrooms. The quality of speaking and listening when pupils work in groups is better than when working as full classes.

113. Because pupils are supportive of each other and, especially for boys in this age group, they are more than usually willing to demonstrate sensitivity, for example,in discussing elements of love poetry as was observed in classes in Year 8, they gain in confidence and widen their vocabularies. The policy of seating boys and girls in mixed groups appears to be helping boys to improve their speaking skills. Pupils at all levels of attainment read accurately at the age of 14. Reading with understanding is less well

established but pupils improve because they are taught to highlight or make notes of main ideas and significant details in the texts they read.

114. Some middle attaining pupils depend upon additional help from teachers to gain satisfactory understanding. Most pupils are able to write appropriately for a variety of purposes. Higher attainers, very much the minority, including some of the youngest, are highly skilled. They use wide vocabularies, a sophisticated range of sentence patterns and are able to organise their material to good effect. Middle attaining pupils communicate clearly but are less accurate in spelling words in common use and in elementary grammar and sentence construction. Many of them show pleasing ambition in their choice of words.

115. Standards of the lowest attaining pupils, including most of those with special educational needs, are well below average, particularly in reading and writing. In basic skills lessons in Year 7, they are able to gain similar understanding to their fellows by working on simpler pieces of writing. They present written work carefully and communicate in recognisable sentences well enough to be understood but need much help from teachers in organising lengthy pieces. In all years, they make good progress because teachers are aware of their difficulties and provide appropriate help. Progress of those with severe learning problems is skilfully helped by the work of learning support assistants.

116. Pupils reach standards in drama that match national levels of skill in planning and performance because they enjoy the lessons which provide good opportunities to work creatively with teachers and each other. Because they have much less time for drama than is provided in most schools, they have insufficient experience to gain their full potential especially in evaluating their own and others' performances.

117. By the end of Year 11, standards are close to but below the expected average for pupils aged 16. Most speak clearly and confidently and listen carefully and with quick understanding. They work well in groups and are able to explore ideas and suggest solutions to tasks, particularly when studying texts. Some examples were noted of very good verse written by pupils in Year 10 and some unusually sophisticated creative writing by pupils in Year 11. Examples included the writing of an additional scene for 'The Merchant of Venice' in which characters presented attitudes towards racial tolerance from both the sixteenth and twenty-first centuries, or an extra chapter for 'Kestrel for a Knave' using some stylistic characteristics of the author. Many middle and most lower attaining pupils have difficulty in organising longer pieces of writing and sustaining acceptable levels of accuracy. Most pupils at all levels of attainment have become more confident and ambitious in their use of language.

118. The quality of teaching is good. It is often very good, is never less than satisfactory and is much more successful than at the time of the previous report. Pupils gain knowledge and improve their skills lesson by lesson so that the standard reached by pupils at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 indicate good achievement from a low staring point. Lessons are well planned and organised and are conducted at a crisp pace towards clearly identified learning targets. Most lessons comprise a series of short, linked units and usually are designed to develop each of the main skills of the subject. Teachers require pupils to contribute as partners in their learning and value their contributions, as do their classmates.

119. Teachers use a good range of questioning strategies to test and to develop understanding and also to prompt contributions to discussion from less confident pupils. These features of teaching ensure high levels of concentration and effort which

pupils are able to sustain because they respond to high challenge and good variety of activity.

120. Very positive relationships between pupils and with teachers encourage pupils to explore ideas and discuss how writers gain their effects so that they improve their own skills and understanding. A very few pupils sometimes fail to meet teachers' expectations of their behaviour. When this happens, teachers are skilful in avoiding confrontation and remain in control, but the pace of learning is reduced. The behaviour of most pupils is very good because they like and respect their teachers and enjoy the work provided. This contributes greatly to the generally good quality of their learning.

121. Almost all teachers in the department have been appointed since the previous inspection. Already they represent a very good team that gives very good support to a dynamic head of department. The quality of their work is not yet fully apparent in the results of national tests and examinations but other improvements since the previous report are clear. Unsatisfactory teaching has been eliminated and teachers are now better qualified by training and experience. Well-organised teaching schemes have been introduced which prepare pupils better for examinations and include increased use of information and communication technology. English literature, drama and media studies are now organised to provide better opportunities for more pupils to succeed at GCSE level. Assessment of pupils' work is generally accurate and comments on written work usually suggest how further improvement might be made. Pupils enjoy their work in the subject and this was not evident at the time of the previous report. The department recognises the need to raise the attainment of boys and is experimenting with changes, for instance in teaching styles and seating arrangements.

122. Most departments contribute to the development of pupils' literacy skills and a number of strategies have been introduced to assist the development of particular groups of pupils. These have not been drawn together into an overarching literacy policy. Except in music, pupils are regularly taught to understand, use and correctly spell words which are necessary for precise communication in each subject. In several subjects, pupils are given guidance, sometimes including the use of writing frames, to help them organise extended writing. Failure to provide opportunities for pupils to write at length, for example in science, reduces achievement. Pupils have good opportunities for discussion in food technology, drama, English, foreign languages, information and communication technology, music, religious studies and personal and social education lessons. Efforts to improve spelling are made in some subjects but not all and, except for English, very few subjects seek to develop note-making skills. In only a minority of lessons do pupils hear teachers reading aloud as good models for them to imitate. Effective teaching of expressive reading is evident only in drama lessons.

123. There is, however, no agreed whole-school policy to underpin present strategies and provide a platform for further development. The school has introduced several provisions to meet identified needs. Each week, one English lesson for all pupils in Year 7 seeks to strengthen pupils' understanding of work done in primary schools and to build upon it. Also in English, pupils in Year 7 are starting to use a computerised learning system intended to improve spelling and reading with understanding. Pupils identified in primary schools as being in the lower section of the average band are given one lesson each day for five weeks to improve their literacy skills and are taught by their subject teachers and the special needs co-ordinator. Pupils with significant difficulties in reading are very well taught by specialist teachers, helped by classroom assistants and provided with a good range of readers purchased with funds donated by the parent-teacher association. A book club has been introduced to encourage more talented readers to develop their skills further. The range and quality of these

developments indicate the school's recognition of the need to raise standards, but most have been introduced too recently for their success to be judged.

MATHEMATICS

124. Pupils' attainment in mathematics is below the national average. Standards, though not yet high enough, are gradually improving. In nearly all years, pupils join the school having reached below national average levels of attainment at the end of their primary school. The majority of pupils maintain a steady rate of progress in their secondary school years and when they leave at 16, their levels of attainment, though still below the national average, are higher than at the time of the previous inspection.

125. The group of 14-year-old pupils who sat the 2000 national tests was well below the national average when they entered the school. This is reflected in their test results at the end of Year 9. The number who attained the national average level was well below the national average. However, the number of pupils who gained the higher levels was below, rather than well below, the national average and overall, the results were in line with those gained by pupils in similar schools. Pupils performed a little better in mathematics than in English but less well than in science. Girls produced significantly better results than boys, unlike in the national picture in which boys perform a little better than girls.

126. In the 2000 GCSE examinations, 30 per cent of pupils gained grades A* to C compared with 47 per cent nationally. An analysis of the performance of the pupils entered for the higher tier indicates that a significant number under-achieved because they failed to produce coursework of a standard required for this tier of entry. Consequently, they did not get the higher grades and reduced the overall proportion obtaining grades A* to C. Overall, results have improved since the previous inspection and results within the A* to G grade range are now in line with the national average for all schools. In 2000, almost every pupil achieved GCSE certification. Both boys and girls performed slightly less well in their mathematics examinations than in their other subjects, particularly boys. Over the past three years, the relative performance of boys and girls has varied and in 1999, there were no significant differences in their performance in mathematics compared with their other subjects.

127. Work seen in the inspection shows that by the end of Year 9, pupils are reaching average standards. This is higher than the test results last year because the attainment of this year group was higher when they started in Year 7. All pupils follow the National Curriculum in the subject at appropriate levels of difficulty. For example, in algebra, lower attaining pupils recognise and simplify similar terms and solve straightforward equations, and higher attaining pupils solve equations of increasing complexity, including simultaneous and quadratic equations. In lessons, boys and girls make similar progress but in many highest attaining groups there is a substantial imbalance between the number of girls and boys. Particularly in the Year 9 groups there are many more girls than boys. Teachers know their pupils very well and effectively use their knowledge to ensure pupils with special educational needs make at least satisfactory progress.

128. Pupils now make good progress in most lessons. Achievement is satisfactory and attainment is still below national averages because significant improvements have not been in place for long enough to have a corresponding impact on standards. Observations of lessons and scrutiny of pupils' work during the inspection indicate that the standards now, though not yet high enough, are improving and higher than indicated by public examination statistics and in the period leading to the 2000 series of examinations. Teaching is more sharply focused and staffing changes have contributed

to teachers adopting a more demanding role in heightening the sights of pupils. The restructuring of most lessons along the guidelines provided in the National Numeracy Strategy and the development of new schemes of work are giving lessons greater impetus and providing for a brisker and more challenging pace.

129. Since the last inspection, there has been a dramatic improvement in the behaviour and attitude of pupils. Most pupils are well motivated and adopt a positive attitude to their work with satisfactory levels of sustained concentration. Relationships between teachers and pupils are generally good and the atmosphere in almost all lessons is characterised by co-operation and harmony. Good quality displays that include the celebration of pupils' work help to generate a positive atmosphere for learning.

130. The overall quality and strength of teaching in mathematics lessons is now good and has improved significantly since the previous report. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection and in more than half of lessons, the teaching was good or very good. It was very good in one in eight lessons.

131. All teachers have a good command of the subject and generally there is a commitment to improving the achievements of the pupils. In the best lessons, the teachers fully involve the pupils during their introductions and explanations. They set a brisk pace with realistic, timed tasks that are well matched to individual pupils' needs. They are energetic and ensure that lessons have a structure that builds on previous learning and that pupils consolidate what they have already learned as well as acquiring new knowledge and skills. For example, a lower attaining group of Year 8 pupils, many with special educational needs, was enthusiastically involved with the teacher in extending and applying their knowledge of perimeters and angles. They responded to challenging work by competently writing down algebraic expressions and ultimately solving the resulting equations. The teacher provided work that matched individual pupils' needs, radiated infectious enthusiasm and ensured an appropriate balance between allowing pupils to work independently and giving assistance. The teacher's skills and command of the subject included an insight into pupils' difficulties and therefore, the facility to measure their progress and promote confidence and self-esteem. The response of pupils was mature and responsible and they were able to discuss competently the extent of their progress and learning and have confidence to tackle more challenging examples.

132. In lessons that are satisfactory overall, the work is covered and pupils are well behaved. However, the teacher fails to generate enthusiasm and does not vary the activities so that the pace is pedestrian and lacking in challenge. In such lessons, the teacher does not involve the pupils in explaining the work and consequently misses opportunities to develop and share ideas and extend the levels of knowledge and understanding. For example, a higher attaining group of pupils studying trigonometrical ratios, competently consolidated their knowledge and skills without speedily applying them to higher levels of application and complexity. The teacher's explanations were clear but lengthy and there was little dialogue between teacher and learners. Consequently, the teacher had to repeat some explanations several times to individuals and although this was effective, the pace of the lesson was slower than the teacher had planned or wanted.

133. The standard of presentation of written work varies across the ability range of pupils. The quality of solutions, particularly in algebra, is sometimes lacking in rigorous, systematic and structured presentation. This makes the logic difficult to follow so the work is not useful for revision. The use of information and communication technology to enrich and support learning in mathematics is a priority in the department's plan for development. There are already examples of good practice and pupils are responding

positively to the department's recently acquired suite of computers. Their use is not yet integrated into all schemes of work. A good start has been made in using the extensive database of pupils' performance to establish targets, identify weaknesses and underachievement and modify schemes of work. The development of sharper day-to-day assessments and the review of short-term individual pupils' targets are already a priority in the department's plan for development. The head of department provides clear educational direction for the subject and the department is effectively and efficiently organised. The department has cohesion and a shared commitment to sustain and extend recent improvements. Departmental documentation is practical and of good quality but plans for development lack detail and rigorous timescales.

134. There is no systematic and co-ordinated whole-school approach to developing or using numeracy skills across the curriculum. The fostering and contribution of numeracy skills across the curriculum is largely confined to science, design and technology and geography. In design and technology, there is positive reinforcement of the use of correct, standardised units and the importance of accurate measurement is constantly emphasised and rehearsed in practical situations. In geography, pupils can use and interpret statistics, for example in considering the siting of a steel works against a background of changing characteristics of economic activity. In science, pupils generally demonstrate the necessary measurement and substitution skills, but in more advanced work, they require extensive help in, for example, transposing formulae and changing units. Other subjects make little contribution to helping pupils improve their numeracy. Overall, the impact and use of numeracy skills across the curriculum is patchy and unplanned.

SCIENCE

135. Standards in science are rising, particularly in pupils up to age 14. In 2000, the results in national tests for this age group were close to the national average. This is a marked improvement on previous years. When compared to similar schools, the results in the same year were well above national results for those attaining both Level 5 and Level 6 and above. However, in the last three years, the attainment of girls at all levels has been consistently better than boys.

136. At GCSE, results for double award science have also shown an improvement. There was a bigger increase in the proportion of pupils attaining A* to C between 1998 and 1999 than between 1999 and the following year. However, results have all been below those attained nationally. Over the last three years, there has been an increase in the proportion of pupils attaining A* to G grades in double award science with results in 2000 very close to the national average. Girls have consistently attained more of the higher grades than boys and results in science have been significantly below other subjects in the school. The group of pupils who take three separate science subjects at GCSE has, over the last three years, shown no pattern either of improvement or in the relative attainment of boys and girls. The very small entry number makes comparisons with national figures difficult.

137. Much analysis of exam results has been done by the department to identify areas where improvement can take place. There is a school system where pupils who are not doing as well as they could at GCSE are identified and given support to improve their weak points. In addition, the department provides additional classes after school that all pupils can attend.

138. Attainment in lessons is slightly better than the national test results indicate. Pupils' achievement is good and by the end of Year 9, standards are broadly average. The difference between the standards seen in Year 9 and the lower attainment of pupils in

the current Year 10 who took the tests last year is due mainly to the difference in attainment between the year groups when they started in Year 7. The school has well documented evidence to show that pupils in the current Year 10 were well below average when they started, while the attainment of the current Year 9, though below average on entry, was higher.

139. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. By the end of Year 11, standards are close to average as pupils make satisfactory progress studying GCSE science. This is an improvement since the last inspection. The improvement is due in part to the improved ethos for work throughout the school which is having a positive effect in all areas. Those pupils who chose to take three separate science subjects form a group with a wide range of ability. This range is preventing all pupils from progressing as well as they might. In lessons, the best progress occurs when teachers set high expectations of pupils' application to work and when methods used are matched to individual needs such as reducing the writing required for those with specific problems.

140. In Year 10 classes, the majority of pupils in the higher sets and studying single sciences at GCSE are attaining levels above what is expected nationally for their age. This again reflects the work being done by both the department and the school to raise the expectations and attainment of pupils. However, in some lessons there is still a marked difference between the commitment and attainment of boys and girls. For instance, in a Year 10 class, fewer than half the boys had brought their books and most had not done their homework. In a Year 7 class, the boys took longer to settle down and get on with their work.

141. Pupils make good progress over the time they study science up to age 14. Each year the department does a detailed analysis of information of pupils on entry and predicts what each is likely to attain based on this data. Last year's results in the national tests demonstrated good progress as many Year 9 pupils achieved levels beyond those expected. In 14- to 16-year-olds this progress is not so noticeable but pupils do make satisfactory progress as they study GCSE science. This is an improvement since the last inspection. In lessons, the best progress occurs when teachers set high expectations of pupils' application to work and when methods used are matched to individual needs such as reducing the writing required for those with specific problems.

142. In nine out of ten lessons seen, teaching was satisfactory or better; in six out of ten of all lessons the teaching was good or very good. The best lessons were in Year 10 where in half of them the teaching was very good. This is an improvement since the previous inspection and reflects the commitment to improvement evident in the department. Teachers all have very secure subject knowledge that allows them to present information in a variety of different ways. Pupils are made clear about what each lesson will contain and what they are expected to know by the end. In the very best lessons, teachers inspire pupils by providing a wide variety of resources to help them understand the topic. In a lower attaining Year 10 group, the teacher used a range of examples to illustrate convection currents including a Christmas candle mobile.

143. When teachers set high expectations for pupils, they respond well and this develops a culture for learning within the classroom allowing pupils to achieve levels beyond those expected for their age. Year 8 pupils were able to write simple chemical equations to explain the reaction of different metals with oxygen gas, correctly naming the products and process involved.

144. Lessons which develop thinking skills are particularly successful because pupils are made to consider their answers carefully as when a Year 9 class were sorting rocks

into types according to their features. More use of this type of approach, where pupils take an active part in the tasks set, could now be developed given the improvement in behaviour. In the majority of lessons, behaviour is good but there are some occasions where the poor behaviour of a minority of pupils prevents effective learning from taking place.

145. When performing practical tasks, pupils work safely observing the guidelines laid down by the teacher. In lessons where the teaching was not so successful, pupils are not challenged enough by the tasks set for them; for example copying notes or the planning of the lesson not allowing the content to be reinforced in a variety of ways. Pupils with special educational needs learn well when the tasks set and resources, such as worksheets, are matched to their specific needs.

146. Whilst homework is set regularly, the variety of tasks is limited and is an area that needs improving. Some good examples seen were individual research into different animals or newspaper reports about the fuel crisis. There is a significant minority of pupils, mainly boys, who persistently do not complete homework and this needs following up more rigorously. Many lower ability pupils have three different science teachers a week, either by design in Year 9 or because of classes split between two or more teachers in Years 7 and 8. This makes it more difficult for teachers to follow up missing homework. Teachers mark pupils' work regularly, following a departmental policy, but do not always give detailed pointers for improvement.

147. Pupils are given many opportunities to learn the language of science: key words are displayed round the laboratories and listed in pupils' books and lower ability pupils use writing frames to help them write report sections such as those needed for practical investigations. However, the skills of speaking, reporting back and writing at length are under-developed in all pupils and occasions where these can be promoted need to be included in lesson planning.

148. Improvement since the previous inspection is good. The department is well led by the acting head of department who has been in post only one term. She heads a team of committed teachers and technicians who are mutually supportive and want to improve the attainment of the pupils they teach. A stimulating learning environment is provided in each of the eleven laboratories, but other resources are only satisfactory. Owing to insufficient and ageing hardware, pupils cannot be given enough hands-on experience in the use of computers to collect and analyse data from experiments and investigations. Whilst staff are willing and able to use the latest technology, this is an area that does not fully meet the requirements of the National Curriculum.

ART AND DESIGN

149. This is a successful department which consistently achieves results which are in line with the national average. This is because there is good teaching and an enthusiasm for the subject. This encourages positive attitudes in pupils and helps them to achieve success.

150. By the end of Year 9, standards are in line with national expectations, as teacher assessments for 13-year-olds in 2000 show. Pupils are able to work competently in a variety of materials and processes. These include pencil, paint, collage, ceramics and printmaking.

151. By the end of Year 11, standards are at the national average, with two-thirds of 15-year-old pupils gaining grades at A* to C in the GCSE examinations in 2000. Girls achieved better results than boys, though both achieve results that are in line with

national figures for their group. Over the last three years, the GCSE results are consistently in line with the national average.

152. Achievement in Years 7, 8 and 9 is good. When pupils come to the school, their work is below average, their drawing skills are poor and their use of paint is crude. By the end of Year 9, they have made good gains in their knowledge of art and design and in their ability to make art using a variety of methods. All pupils study a range of artists and art movements and this adds variety to their work. Pupils learn about the work of Vincent Van Gogh, the Surrealists and African and Hindu art and this enables them to express their own ideas in a variety of styles and media. Colour is used well and there are some sensitive watercolour sketches seen which use a range of earth colours to good effect. These are based on the study of natural forms such as leaves and pieces of tree bark. Sketchbooks are used regularly but there is little evidence of their use for extended research and experimentation. Information and communication technology is used to some extent for research and to create and modify images, but it is not used as effectively as it could be.

153. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good when the work of 15-year-olds is compared to their work at the age of 13. They make good gains in their drawing skills in particular, and by the age of 15, they are able to produce very accurate observation studies of everyday objects. There are some very well observed drawings in pencil and coloured pencil which show a grasp of perspective and a good control of the materials. In addition, work in chalk pastel is vigorous and there are some strong drawings from natural forms such as fruit and seed heads. Work in printmaking shows a high level of technical competence and a good use of colour and there are some strong three-dimensional pieces in ceramics which are richly textured. Much of the painting however, is on a smaller scale and is not as adventurous as it might be.

154. Pupils with special educational needs work well in lessons. They make similar progress to other pupils.

155. Teaching and learning in art and design are good in all years. Two-thirds of lessons seen were at least good and there were no unsatisfactory lessons. In Years 7, 8 and 9, teachers are encouraging and enthusiastic, and this leads to a good level of engagement with the work and good learning. In the best lessons, there are knowledgeable and stimulating introductions. This was seen in a lesson on perspective drawing where the main ideas were presented in a clear and interesting way so that pupils were able to understand the main points quickly and clearly and very good learning was the result. Sometimes, in lessons that are satisfactory overall, the pace of the lesson is too slow and pupils' attention wanders at times. This limits learning to a satisfactory level.

156. In Years 10 and 11, a strength of the teaching is the use of a variety of teaching aids. In a lesson on portraiture, prepared examples and a relevant video programme were shown to the pupils so that they made good gains in their knowledge of the subject. Relationships between teachers and pupils have a positive effect on pupils' attitudes, building good levels of interest and promoting good learning. Weaker aspects of teaching are seen where lesson introductions are too long and cover too much ground so that pupils lose focus on the main points of the lesson.

157. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards in Years 10 and 11 have improved, especially in drawing, and achievement in all years has improved. The quality of teaching and learning is now good and the procedures for monitoring progress have improved.

158. Leadership and management of the subject are good. There is a shared commitment to success and improvement and a strong sense of teamwork. This has helped to raise standards since the last inspection. Standards have been consistently maintained over the last six months in spite of long-term sickness affecting two-thirds of the permanent staff in the department. This is because the interim management has successfully concentrated on raising achievement, especially in Years 10 and 11, and especially in drawing. However, because of this, departmental planning and documentation are not up-to-date.

159. Display and storage facilities are unsatisfactory. This means that the successful work produced in the department cannot be used to its full potential to create high quality displays in the classroom. This makes it more difficult to exemplify high standards. In addition, there are not enough books on art and design in the school library so that pupils do not have enough books to take home to extend their study of the subject.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

160. This is a successful department with many positive features. Examination results have improved over the last three years and good teaching has contributed to an increase in standards. There is a positive learning environment and pupils are usually enthusiastic and enjoy lessons.

161. In 2000, results were above national averages in GCSE food technology and GNVQ engineering and average in textiles. They were below average in electronics and well below in graphic products and resistant materials. There has been an improvement in performance in electronics, food technology and textiles from the 1999 results.

162. Graphic products and particularly resistant materials show little improvement. However, in relation to their attainment when they started these courses, most pupils achieve considerable success.

163. Current attainment at the end of Year 9 is below average. This matches recent teacher assessments, with girls performing near to national expectations and better than boys on average. From their low attainment on entry, most pupils' progress is good. There is improvement through Years 7 to 9 and pupils' design skills develop well. A cushion cover project in textiles was particularly well presented and work on frame and shell structures in resistant materials was well researched. Where the work is weaker, it is often due to poorer graphical skills or too little research with work sometimes incomplete.

164. Current attainment at the end of Year 11 is just below the national average overall and marginally so for girls. This matches the improvement seen in most specialisms and particularly food technology, electronics and textiles, where current work is broadly in line with the national average. Design folders show a range of ways of illustrating pupils' ideas. Their folders include commercial material, photographs, freehand sketching and well used information and communication technology. Good examples are:

- the investigation of multicultural main course dishes and a vegetarian product using a new type of protein in food technology;
- the fashion accessories project in textiles;
- a remote control car investigation, including modelling, in graphic products.

165. Where the work is weaker it is mainly due to a lack of initial ideas and poor presentation. The GNVQ engineering folders show a good standard of work with most units showing the required detail.

166. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall with over two-thirds of lessons in both key stages being good. There was no unsatisfactory teaching. The better lessons are lively in pace, use appropriate teaching strategies and keep pupils focused on the task. In a Year 7 textiles lesson, the teacher's clear explanations and careful demonstration helped pupils to carry out the task themselves successfully and to appreciate the reasons for what they did. Lively question and answer sessions remind pupils about what they already know and allow them to share ideas with each other. Satisfactory lessons have many good features but shortcomings can include lengthy introductions or intervals when pupils are not fully involved. Lessons are usually well planned and a prominent feature in all lessons is the use of key words to help pupils learn to use and spell technical words correctly. Pupils' attitudes to lessons are usually good and they work well in pairs or groups and share workplaces willingly. Relationships are good and pupils are eager to answer questions and volunteer ideas, but in some classes, a significant minority does not complete homework.

167. Achievement is good. From low standards on entry, pupils reach levels that are just below average by the end of Year 9. In Years 10 and 11, pupils make good progress, particularly in food technology, electronics, textiles and engineering and achievement is better than their earlier standards would predict. Results in resistant materials are generally low but represent good achievement given these pupils' low starting point.

168. Assessment is linked to National Curriculum levels in Years 7 to 9 and examination requirements in Years 10 and 11. The information from assessment is used to set pupils' targets to improve.

169. The curriculum meets statutory requirements in all years and a small number of vocational courses are also offered in Years 10 and 11. The department could consider further GNVQ courses as a means of broadening pupils' choice. The department is efficiently led and documentation is thorough and well prepared. The development plan is good and used well as a working document. There are effective links with local industries and Sunderland University that increase pupils' knowledge of the way materials are used in manufacturing. Strategies for improving literacy are effective and the use of key words a strong feature in developing technical language. Technical support for teachers is good in all areas of the department.

170. Accommodation is good overall but some food technology rooms are rather cramped when full classes are present. All rooms provide a stimulating learning environment with a good standard of display in rooms and in corridors. Resources are satisfactory overall but there is a shortage of information and communication equipment for some aspects of pupils' work, particularly in the early years.

171. Since the last inspection, examination results have improved in most specialisms. Literacy and numeracy skills are featured in schemes of work, displays of work support learning and assessment procedures are contributing to raising standards.

GEOGRAPHY

172. Pupils enjoy geography and a significant number choose it in Years 10 and 11.

173. By the end of Year 9, pupils' overall attainment is average. This represents good progress for the majority when achievement is matched against levels of attainment on

entry in Year 7. Pupils display improving graphical, mapping and diagrammatic skills. They are able to carry out enquiry tasks on the themes and places they study. Particularly good pieces of work on the Amazonian rain forest were seen in Year 9. This work included the use of computers to research and present information.

174. By the end of Year 11, attainment is currently below the national average. During the inspection, Year 11 pupils were engaged on internal examinations and judgements are based on observation of a selection of examination scripts and assessment grades over the period of the course. With the exception of a small number of top set pupils, higher order skills of analysis and evaluation are weak.

175. In Year 10, attainment is better and is at least in line with what is expected of GCSE pupils by this stage in the course. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good. Most pupils, particularly but not exclusively girls, are making good progress in acquiring knowledge and understanding about themes and places studied. As in earlier years, pupils can work independently. They show clear understanding of factors influencing the changing patterns of economic activity and industrial location and the weather and climate of this country. In all years there is evidence, both from the numbers of girls in top groups and from work seen, that girls are achieving at a higher level than the majority of boys.

176. In 1998 and 1999, GCSE results were among the best in the school. Girls did particularly well and they attained at a level above the national average for girls. In 2000, boys' and girls' results were below the national average for both higher grades A* to C and overall A* to G grades. This resulted mainly from some weaknesses in coursework.

177. Teaching and learning are good, with some very good practice, particularly in Years 10 and 11, where specialist teachers take the classes. Unfortunately during the inspection week, two teachers were ill and their lessons were covered by supply staff. Lesson planning is thorough. Clear aims are set and communicated to pupils and this has a positive effect on learning. Expectations are high and most lessons are conducted at a good pace. Effective attention is given to developing independent learning and thinking skills. A good example was observed in Year 10, when pupils considered case studies on changing economic and industrial patterns.

178. Methods used encourage pupils to ask geographical questions and use subject language accurately. In a significant majority of lessons, teachers manage pupils well. Pupils have very positive attitudes and achieve well in lessons across all years in relation to their attainment on entry to the school. Appropriate tasks are set for pupils with special educational needs that result in good progress in learning. Increasing use is being made of computers as a tool to learn geography. Marking is thorough and comments give pupils good guidance on how to improve. Good use is made of practical and field study opportunities enabling pupils to see the links between theory and practice. Teachers also use local case studies effectively to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding. There was a very small percentage of less than satisfactory teaching. This teaching was associated with weaker class control and too little progress in learning. Overall the quality of teaching, combined with good responses from a significant number of pupils, has a positive influence on progress and achievement. Effective independent, research-based learning was also observed in Year 8, developing basic mapping skills and knowledge of coastal erosion features.

179. Pupils are encouraged to use computers for researching and presenting their work. Some classes use computer software to help learn mapping skills. Teachers are keen to use information and communication technology and most are confident and

competent but there is a need to ensure better access to the computer suite and to provide further training for less confident staff.

180. No major key issues were raised in the last report in 1999. The department continues to be enthusiastically led and managed and there is a good team spirit and a desire to do the very best for all pupils. This, combined with a good work scheme, has a beneficial effect on pupils' learning. Attention needs to be given to improving subject development planning and continuing to improve the achievement of boys. Resources are good except for the poor quantity and quality of geography books in the Library.

HISTORY

181. The provision for the teaching of history is at present unsatisfactory because of weaknesses in staffing and managing the department.

182. Overall, attainment by the end of Year 9 is below average. In teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9, 58 per cent of pupils achieved at least Level 5 compared with 60 per cent nationally, but these figures are not reliable. The basis of these assessments is flawed and figures for previous years are wildly unrealistic. Attainment at the end of Year 9 is below average. This is partly because pupils' attainment when they start the subject is below average and many pupils do not enter the school with high levels of literacy. At present, the attainment of boys at the end of Year 9 is significantly lower than that of girls.

183. Attainment at the end of Year 11 is below average. In the GCSE examination in 2000, 45 per cent of pupils entered for the subject achieved at least a grade C. The figure nationally for this standard in 2000 was 57.5 per cent. All pupils entered for the examination achieved at least a grade G. Results over recent years show a small improvement on those of 1997 and earlier. Boys and girls did equally well in 2000, though in 1999, the results of girls were better.

184. No Year 11 lessons were seen but an examination of their GCSE coursework showed that many have attained a good standard. However, they have spent a disproportionate amount of time on coursework and will have to cover the rest of the syllabus more quickly than is desirable in order to be ready for the examination. In Year 10 lessons, many pupils are not achieving an adequate standard of work. Their teachers are at present poorly equipped to teach the GCSE syllabus. Pupils are not able to study in adequate detail important topics like the causes of the Second World War. Because they are not being taught about key events in the order in which they occurred, pupils have a limited understanding of how they relate to each other.

185. In the work seen during the inspection, pupils' achievement in Years 7 to 9 depended considerably on the quality of the teaching and overall, in spite of some very good teaching, it is unsatisfactory. A group of Year 8 pupils of average ability were able to use pictures and contemporary documents about Henry VIII before producing a written account of his main characteristics. The teacher managed the lesson very well and got pupils to think like historians as they drew conclusions from different sources of evidence. However, a top group spent most of a lesson producing a time chart of Henry VIII's family life when many of the pupils had already researched this topic very well at home. In the best lessons, there is an emphasis on the principal historical skills. In some lessons, pupils study a range of well-produced sources that they are able to understand and rank in importance. With the help of a structured plan, they are able to use the sources to express their ideas about the topic. Work produced by a Year 7 class on life in towns in the Middle Ages was impressive, as was work on the slave trade by a Year 9 group. In other lessons, pupils are not achieving as much as they

should. Pupils with learning difficulties make satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 9 in lessons where the work is pitched at a suitable, though challenging, level for them and where they have additional support. In Years 10 and 11, their progress is similar to that of other pupils, and is, consequently, unsatisfactory.

186. The quality of teaching is variable. At its best, it is very good but a high proportion of teaching seen during the inspection, nearly a quarter, was unsatisfactory. Successful lessons are well planned so that pupils work on appropriate tasks and do not waste time. Teachers and pupils relate well to each other. However, in a number of lessons, there is not sufficient emphasis on challenging the pupils to think. These lessons are poorly planned, and the teacher talks for too long without involving pupils. Pupils are not kept properly occupied and occasionally poor behaviour occurs. There is a long-term absence in the department so some classes are being taught by a succession of temporary teachers who do not have a sound knowledge of the subject. A Year 8 class which had already studied the Reformation in the reigns of the later Tudor sovereigns went backwards to learn about the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the first half of the sixteenth century.

187. The department does not make sufficient use of information and communication technology to teach history. There are difficulties in gaining access to computer rooms, but a greater cause for concern is the reluctance of the department to consider the benefits of using information and communication technology.

188. In the previous inspection, there were criticisms about the standard of teaching for the younger pupils, who made insufficient progress and whose behaviour was sometimes variable. The department has not taken sufficient measures to meet these concerns and the degree of improvement is therefore unsatisfactory. Unsatisfactory teaching still occurs in Years 7 to 9 and now is also found in older age groups. The number of pupils choosing to study the subject to GCSE has not increased and remains very poor for a school of this size. Procedures for assessing the progress of pupils are inadequate, especially at the end of Year 9. There is no evidence that the department has taken any action to ensure that pupils of different levels of ability make more progress. There is a very brief action plan which does not deal with these matters properly. The head of department has taken no significant action to monitor the quality of teaching of his colleagues. Behaviour has improved but that is more a consequence of the change in the school climate than a reflection on any changes made by teachers of history.

189. The management of the department is poor. In part, this is due to staff absence and a recent resignation. At present, a recently qualified teacher, a part-time history teacher and a supply teacher all require detailed advice on how to teach the history syllabus properly and thereby raise the level of pupil achievement. It is impossible to meet this requirement. However, the weaknesses in the department are also long term. The failure to act upon the comments made in the previous report means that many pupils have continued to underachieve in history. At present, their progress is far too dependent upon the knowledge, ability and experience, or the lack of it, of their particular teacher.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

190. Since the last inspection, there have been a number of changes in the department. There are now five well-equipped rooms for the subject. ICT is taught as a separate subject in all years of the school and all pupils in Years 10 and 11 take an examination in the subject. There have been a number of staff changes with three new teachers joining the department in September 2000.

191. There has been a significant improvement in examination results over the last four years. In the 2000 examinations, 71 per cent of pupils gained grades above C compared with national figures of 54 per cent in the full GCSE course, whilst a higher percentage of pupils gained above C grade in the short GCSE course than in the previous year. This improvement has been matched by pupils aged 14 where 59 per cent of the pupils scored above Level 5, showing a good increase on the results from previous years and which are now in line with national averages.

192. Work seen during the inspection matches the examination results. By the end of Year 11, standards are above average. Pupils studying the GCSE course can use an advanced range of skills for communicating, handling data and modelling events. They word process their work carefully and use clip art carefully to improve the quality of their presentations. In Year 11 in GCSE, pupils taking the full course have completed their projects, showing evidence of good evaluation and improvement in their work.

193. By the end of Year 9, pupils' work is in line with the expected level for their age and a significant minority are working above this level. They make good use of software to present information to a range of audiences. They understand how to get information from a variety of sources, such as the Internet and from CD ROMs.

194. These standards are evidence of good achievement and are due to good progress in all years. In Year 7, pupils are able to use desktop publishing and word processing showing good use of a range of fonts to make effective presentation of their work. They have a good understanding of the effects of ICT at home and at school. They show confidence in using computers and are able to log on to the network and access a variety of software programs. Pupils in Year 8 build well on this base and are more aware of audience with their presentations. Their work shows good use of desktop publishing, word processing and computer clip art and they have learned about the impact of ICT on entertainment and in 'the high street'.

195. In GCSE full and short courses in Year 10, pupils make good progress to complete their work in the communication module, making use of higher level skills. Completed projects by GCSE pupils show evidence of good evaluation and improvement in their work.

196. Pupils are very well behaved during lessons. They take care of equipment, they are very interested in the subject and they stay focused on tasks set. Pupils respond willingly in question and answer sessions. Pupils show maturity in lessons, they are eager to work and there are many occasions where good relationships enable them help each other.

197. Teaching in the subject is very good; occasionally it is excellent. All teachers have very good subject knowledge and give extremely clear and detailed explanations, which are major factors in helping pupils to learn new skills and concepts. Lessons are well planned, appropriate tasks are selected and there is clear progression through modules of work, which follow the Programmes of Study in the handbook. Planning takes into account the full range of attainment of pupils, from those with special need to the gifted and talented pupils who have been identified. On occasions, more help from learning assistants in lessons would be beneficial for slower pupils, however, extension work has been created for gifted and talented pupils.

198. Teachers create a good working atmosphere in which pupils learn well. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and encourage them to work independently but offer them individual support where and when necessary. The good assessment used both by teachers and the pupils themselves helps to set targets for improvement. These targets

are often outlined at the start of lessons and this gives pupils a clear idea of what is expected of them and a focus for their work. Longer-term targets for modules of work are valuable in motivating pupils.

199. Pupils achieve well in the subject, making good progress as they increase their knowledge, understanding and the use of computers and a range of software. They increase in confidence and improve their keyboard skills. Building on basic word processing skills and the use of desktop publishing, they show increasingly effective presentation of work as they progress from Year 7 onwards. In spreadsheet work, pupils make good progress in modules of work in each year as well as building on skills from one year to the next. In Year 7, they learn about cell location and entering data, this is further extended in Year 8 where pupils learn to use formula. In Year 9, pupils learn how to use the power of spreadsheets to predict outcomes as they increase their understanding of both the value of spreadsheets in business as well as how to enter and manipulate data. Pupils taking GCSE in both Years 10 and 11 consolidate these skills and apply them effectively in their course work.

200. The department has made a very good response to the previous inspection, all pupils now take an accredited course in Key Stage 4, the majority the short GCSE course, but increasing numbers are opting for the full course. There has been a significant improvement in GCSE results which were well above average in 2000. This is the result of a very well managed department with very well structured courses and a team of professionals with a commitment to improve pupils' opportunities and performance in the subject.

201. Pupils are not fully able to use their learnt skills from their taught ICT lessons in other subjects. In GCSE courses and GNVQ courses, many pupils are able to use word processing and desktop publishing skills to present their projects, this being particularly well done in GNVQ and in GCSE physical education. However, the use of ICT across the curriculum has yet to be fully developed.

202. The majority of departments acknowledge the use of ICT in their schemes of work but too few departments put this into practice enough. For example, datalogging in science is only done as a demonstration. In art, there is barely enough use of ICT to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum but new equipment is about to be installed. There is insufficient use of computers in modern languages to be sure that all pupils have an opportunity to use them as required. In mathematics, the department has made a start on planning the use of ICT to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum but this is not complete. While most teachers use computers competently, a minority still need training.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

203. Foreign language teaching is strong. All pupils study at least one foreign language from Year 7 to Year 11. Pupils have an unusually wide choice of French plus an option to take Spanish or German. Teaching and learning in all languages are good and results in Spanish are consistently above average. All pupils study one and some two languages for five years and virtually all leave school with a GCSE grade.

204. In 2000, the proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades in GCSE examinations in French was below the national average, but higher than in the previous year. Results in French at A* to G were in line with the national average. GCSE results at A* to C in German were well below the national average, and lower than in the previous year. The proportion of pupils gaining grades at A* to G was similar to the national average. All

pupils entering for Spanish in 2000 gained grades A* to G. The proportion attaining A* to C grades was higher than the national average and higher than in the previous year.

205. The current attainment of pupils in French and Spanish in Year 9 is in line with national expectations. In German, where teaching has previously been less consistent, attainment is slightly lower. Most pupils can follow lessons taught entirely or largely in the foreign language. A minority of lower attainers, including some pupils with special educational needs, benefit from explanations in English. After a term spent learning French, all pupils exchange greetings and hold short conversations about themselves, their daily lives and their interests. They soon learn to express their likes and dislikes about school life and leisure interests. Most read and write brief statements in a variety of styles ranging from dialogues to advertisements. A substantial minority of pupils, including able linguists and those requesting it, start a second European language, German or Spanish, in Year 8. Most build successfully on the language learning skills acquired in French and make good progress. By the end of Year 9, many pupils can use tenses other than the present to talk and write about past and future events, and can describe people and places in detail. Pupils of all abilities enjoy simulating and recording everyday situations ranging from shopping and buying snacks to motoring emergencies. Their level of grammatical awareness is good, both boys and girls showing curiosity and insight into gender and verb forms.

206. In Years 10 and 11, all pupils continue with one language and a substantial minority opts to continue with two. The preference of many higher attaining girls for Spanish is reflected in high standards, although pupils studying French and German are starting to achieve levels similar to those found nationally. Many pupils extend the range of their vocabulary and the structures that they use in speaking and writing about their recent experiences and future plans. By the end of Year 11, attainment is broadly average. The improved standards over last year's examination results are due mainly to the improving quality of teaching and the higher standards pupils are beginning to demand of themselves in the light of the school's improved culture for learning.

207. The ablest linguists, tutored by their teachers and the foreign language assistants, produce polished prose expressing the humour and disappointment of holidays, or ideas for improving school life. Many pupils can understand authentic texts dealing with social or environmental issues. Lower attainers, including some pupils with special educational needs, consolidate everyday language about topics such as travel, sport and personal interests. All pupils write in styles adapted to different purposes such as letters and tourist information. Girls usually produce neater and more accurate work than boys, although bright, stimulating wall displays reflect painstaking efforts by both genders. A few pupils regularly use computers to improve the quality and presentation of their work, although many only have infrequent opportunities to communicate in this way.

208. Teaching and learning are always at least satisfactory and good overall. Most lessons in all years are good or very good. Teaching in a few lessons is excellent. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are familiar with the requirements of the National Curriculum and the demands of external examinations. Their high expectations of pupils mean that virtually all achieve well and leave school with valid language qualifications. All pupils benefit from consistently applied strategies, including the exploration of grammar points and the accumulation through frequent use of important words and phrases. In many French and German lessons and invariably in Spanish, pupils gain additionally from their teachers' high level of fluency, animated delivery and intensive use of the foreign language. A few lessons are less imaginatively based on conventional resources and follow a predictable sequence of whole-class activities. Teachers have firm, businesslike relations with their pupils who gain confidence from

the structured approach to learning. Many lessons include enjoyable sketches, games and competitions, where pupils of all abilities can earn credits or win prizes.

209. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated and benefit from support and individual attention from the language teachers and their assistants.

210. In the best lessons, the time is used well and pupils have a chance to listen, speak, read and write in turn, so that skills are evenly developed. Occasionally, when presentations are long and involved, a few pupils lose interest and achieve little, but most enjoy working in pairs and appreciate their classmates' contributions. Teachers monitor and assess their pupils' work rigorously and frequently, using statistical evidence where possible to appraise and predict their progress. The information and advice given to pupils and their parents is full and detailed and helps sustain the involvement of many until the end of their course. Teachers prepare and extend their lessons with appropriate homework, although a minority of older pupils are unwilling to work independently. Together with the language assistants, they enrich pupils' learning with clubs and extra lessons, some involving work on computers. The benefits of Internet links have yet to be properly exploited and there is a need for more training to make sure all members of the department are confident about using computers in lessons. A regular programme of short visits abroad complements studies in class.

211. The department is very well managed, cohesive and hard working. Teachers and their assistants share a common sense of purpose, deriving satisfaction from the quality and extent of the school's language provision. They have largely resolved problems of behaviour and the quality of teaching apparent at the last inspection. Recent training and a general improvement in pupils' attitudes have helped them improve the performance of boys, although work remains to be done. There are further opportunities for teachers who are adept at teaching in the foreign language to share their skill with colleagues through a programme of mutual observation and evaluation. Further training and technical assistance is required to enable more rapid development in the use of information and communication technology.

MUSIC

212. Standards in the 2000 statutory teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were broadly in line with the national average. There was no significant difference between the standards of boys and girls. Standards in the 2000 GCSE examination by 15-year-old pupils have improved since the previous inspection. Entry numbers are too small to provide valid national comparisons. In 1998, half of pupils gained A* to C grades and all pupils gained A* to G. In 1999, two-thirds of pupils gained A* to C grades and all pupils gained A* to G. In 2000, all pupils gained A* to C grades. Girls gain higher grades than boys.

213. Standards in work seen during the inspection are in line with these assessments and results. By the end of Year 9, attainment is in line with expectations and a significant minority of pupils achieve higher standards. A number of these pupils are supported in their learning by additional instrumental lessons and extra-curricular performing opportunities provided by the school. Standards at the end of Year 11 are above average. Year 11 pupils were not in classes during the inspection week. However, analysis of their work showed that standards in listening and composing are above average and pupils can, for example, grasp the concept of transposing for instruments in B flat.

214. Pupils' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. Many pupils do not have the range of knowledge and skills expected of their age group when they enter the school and

many are not familiar with the elements of music. There is satisfactory progress throughout Years 7, 8 and 9 in playing and performing. Pupils' composition skills are underdeveloped because opportunities for pupils to compose work independently are not always regular. In one lesson seen, low attaining pupils made unsatisfactory progress because the lesson had too much content and there was an over-emphasis on the reading and writing of notation. The valuable teaching of recorder playing in Years 7, 8 and 9 is encouraging the reading of notation and improving pupils' sense of ensemble playing. In one Year 9 lesson, good teaching encouraged pupils to produce a pleasing tone and play with accuracy. Pieces had been carefully chosen and pupils showed enthusiasm for the lesson.

215. Achievement is good in Years 10 and 11. Pupils make good progress in class and in instrumental lessons. The quality and range of extra-curricular activities raises the standard of performance for those involved and makes a valuable contribution to the life of the school. Those pupils working at below average levels in Year 10 are hardworking and show a willingness to learn. Brass ensemble playing during the lunchtime showed that standards of performance and ensemble playing are very good. All six pupils are working at high levels and reflect the pattern of rising standards in GCSE results.

216. Teaching is satisfactory overall. In Years 10 and 11 teaching is good. Strengths in teaching are:

- teachers' subject knowledge;
- very good classroom management which leads to very good behaviour of pupils;
- effectiveness of planning for middle and high attainers;
- the quality of ongoing assessment.

217. The content and activities of lessons are chosen with careful regard as to what appeals to young people. As a result, the majority of pupils respond with enthusiasm. For example, in one Year 8 lesson, good teaching encouraged pupils' curiosity and imagination when they were asked to listen to The Skaters' Waltz and imagine sights, sounds and smells of the scene. In the small amount of unsatisfactory teaching, the task of writing a piece in music notation was too difficult. The teacher did not help by reinforcing the theory with practical activities such as clapping the rhythm of a piece or singing it.

218. The department is well organised. Schemes of work meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. Weaknesses occur in the interpretation of the schemes of work in some lessons where there is too much theory and not enough practical work, particularly for lower attaining pupils.

219. The department has made satisfactory progress since the previous report. GCSE results have improved although the take-up is still low. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are now very good in most lessons. All staff are suitably qualified and experienced to teach music. The department has purchased new keyboards. The department makes effective use of electronic keyboards and further development of information and communication technology is planned, with four new computers due to arrive shortly.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

220. During the inspection week it was not possible to see the full range of the work of the department as the sports hall was being used for GCSE Year 11 trial exams. As a

consequence, a number of lessons had to be rearranged and it was not possible for the department to follow their planned curriculum fully during the week.

221. Standards in GCSE results in recent years have fluctuated. In 1998 and 1999, 40 per cent of pupils scored above C grade. This is an improvement over the 1997 results. There was a fall in A* to C grades in 2000 to well below the national average.

222. The standards of work seen during the inspection week are average. In soccer, by the end of Year 9, the majority of pupils are working at expected levels although some lower attainers lack the basic passing skills of the game. In dance, girls have a good range of expressive movements and work well in pairs performing routines to different types of music. In orienteering in this year, many pupils find difficulty in setting a compass and walking on a bearing without help from the teacher.

223. By the end of Year 11, the coursework of pupils taking GCSE is average. Many have completed their analytical studies and some are making good use of information and communication technology in their studies to improve the presentation of their folders. Pupils have a satisfactory understanding of the skeletal system and methods of training.

224. Pupils' achievement in physical education is satisfactory. They make steady progress in developing a range of skills. In Year 7, pupils acquire satisfactory passing skills in soccer. Some higher attainers are able to head the ball effectively and show close control when under pressure in game situations. By Year 8, pupils in basketball lessons show a wide range of attainment and although there are no higher attainers, the majority of pupils are developing satisfactory skills as well as knowledge of the basic rules of the game. It was not possible to see the work of non-examination classes in Year 11, but standards seen in Year 10 show that pupils are making satisfactory progress from a below-average base. Girls in Year 10 are working at or below expected levels for their age group. Although they know basic rules they have poor passing, receiving and footwork when playing in organised games. In basketball, boys in Year 10 are able to dribble the ball and change hands and direction but lack quality in shooting, with low success rates. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.

225. Teaching in the subject is satisfactory in both key stages, and pupils learn new skills, refine existing ones and increase their knowledge and understanding. Teachers have good subject knowledge and give clear explanations that help pupils improve. When objectives and tasks are explained to pupils at the start of lessons in the changing rooms, as in Year 7 soccer, pupils are able to make an effective start to the lesson when they get outside. In this year, they show independence and are able to warm up with the minimum amount of teacher intervention. Planning of lessons is generally well done and appropriate tasks and practices are matched to pupils' attainment. Sometimes however, there is insufficient challenge in the work set, as in a Year 10 netball lesson where the practices would have been more appropriate for younger pupils. Pupils are usually well managed and good behaviour is maintained so that all pupils have the opportunity to learn. Pupils are generally responsive to teachers' instructions and take part in question and answer sessions. In Year 10 GCSE theory, a range of teaching styles maintained pupils' motivation levels and helped some of the lower attainers in the group to increase their understanding of the skeletal system. Although there are well prepared notes in pupils' files for GCSE, there is insufficient evidence that pupils do enough work by themselves to make sure they consolidate their learning.

226. Pupils are interested in the subject and keen to participate. They work at tasks and practices with some independence. They work well together in small groups, particularly in dance, co-operating well when developing routines. Where they are unable to take part because of injury or other reasons, they are not always involved in the lesson. In a Year 7 soccer lesson and a Year 10 netball lesson, pupils not taking part were given tasks to help with practices and evaluate performances and umpire. However, in a Year 10 basketball and in a Year 10 netball lesson, a third of the pupils were not participating and had no involvement in the lesson.

227. Pupils make satisfactory progress in the subject, building on skills learned each year. They learn new skills in all activities and refine and improve existing ones. In soccer, pupils increase their control in all aspects of the game as they move through the school. They are able to show higher levels of control in Year 9 and are able to evaluate the effectiveness of using different parts of the body to control the ball. In Year 10, GCSE pupils make good progress as they increase their knowledge and understanding of body systems and methods of training. Where pupils make less progress in an activity it is because teaching schemes of work do not identify ways to help teachers build pupils' skills systematically and some modules of work are too short.

228. There has been a satisfactory response to the previous inspection. The department continues to maintain a good range of extra-curricular activities with some success in soccer, cricket, cross-country and tennis that is due to a shared commitment by the physical education staff.

229. The management of the department is satisfactory but schemes of work have insufficient detail and do not incorporate fully the requirements of National Curriculum 2000. Further work needs to be done to ensure more accurate assessment of pupils' levels of attainment. The time allocation for the subject for some pupils in Years 8 and 9 is half that seen nationally and insufficient to fulfil the National Curriculum. In Years 8 and 9, around half the pupils have only one hour for physical education each week. This is below average and unchanged since the previous inspection.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

230. This is a lively and well-managed department. Colourful and stimulating classrooms create an environment in which pupils make good progress.

231. There are no recent examination results to compare with national figures. Pupils arrive in school with a wide variation in their understanding of religious ideas. By the end of Year 9, standards are in line with those set out in the locally agreed syllabus. They can identify some of the main beliefs and practices of the major religions in our society. A Year 9 class fully understood the meaning of the 5 K's for a Sikh. Their understanding of Christianity is good. They can correctly use religious language and understand the central part that symbolism plays in religion. A Year 7 class was considering the important role that stories play in communicating religious teaching.

232. They have a good grasp of the important role that religion plays in seeking answers to profound questions. They understand the value of such things as festivals for a believing community and are able to recognise the way in which religion inspires and motivates people. A Year 9 group produced some excellent work on the life of Anne Frank. Those with below average ability and special educational needs make good progress. For the rest, progress is satisfactory. The more able pupils are not always pushed as hard as they might be.

233. The current Year 11 is only able to take the certificate of achievement course. Because of examinations it was not possible to see this group, but analysis of their course work indicated that by the end of Year 11, standards are lower than they could be because of the lack of a deeper challenge in this course.

234. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good overall. The gradual phasing in of examination work for Years 10 and 11 has had a good impact on standards. The current Year 10 pupils are following the short GCSE course. Their achievement is good and standards are in line with those set out in the agreed syllabus. They are able to consider the teaching of religion on important moral and social issues. They are sensitive to the beliefs and values of others and recognise the important role that religion plays in giving purpose and meaning to life. In a lesson on love, a class thoughtfully considered the teaching of Christianity on homosexuality.

235. There has been a significant improvement in the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection. The classroom environment is colourful, with excellent displays of pupils' work. Most lessons seen were at least good. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject and use a variety of teaching methods to ensure that lessons are interesting. In a Year 8 class, a group of pupils was fully involved in an exercise based upon the television series 'Who wants to be a millionaire?'. Good resources are used well to inform and stimulate progress. Assessment is satisfactory. Written work is well marked and the teacher gives good feedback to pupils. There is, however, a small but significant proportion of unsatisfactory teaching in Years 7 to 9. Here there is a lack of pace, group discussions are not handled well and pupils' behaviour is unsatisfactory.

236. In the majority of lessons, pupils are attentive and play an active part in the lesson. Their responses indicate an open and sensitive attitude to religious issues. A Year 10 class examined the Christian teaching on marriage in a mature and thoughtful way. Written work is carefully prepared, with some excellent projects on display in the classroom.

237. The subject is well managed with clear aims and objectives. Progress since the last inspection has been good. A new syllabus is in place with modern resources available. Although well equipped with computers, the department has not fully integrated these into the scheme of work. There is a need to provide more challenging tasks for higher attaining pupils. The department could also consider ways to manage group discussions more effectively so that all pupils have a chance to hear and speak.