

INSPECTION REPORT

Valley Park Community School

Maidstone

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 131245

Headteacher: Ms J Rider

Reporting inspector: Ms S Tweddell
1709

Dates of inspection: 10 – 14 January 2000

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Secondary Modern
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 - 19
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Huntsman Lane Maidstone Kent
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs M Featherstone
Date of previous inspection:	First inspection

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Sandra Tweddell	Registered inspector	English as an additional language	What sort of school is it
			The school's results and achievements
			How well are students taught
			How well is the school led and managed
			What should the school do to improve further
David Tytler	Lay inspector	N/A	Students' attitudes, values and personal development
			How well does the school care for its students
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents
			Community links
Paul Cosway	Team inspector	English	
		Drama	
		Media studies	
		Equal opportunities	
Lynn Bappa	Team inspector	Religious education	N/A
James Bowden	Team inspector	Physical education	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students
		Special educational needs	

David Gutmann	Team inspector	Business vocation	Sixth form
		GNVQ	
Richard Hickman	Team inspector	Art	N/A
Barbara Johnstone	Team inspector	Music	N/A
Michael Lafford	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	N/A
Andrew Piggott	Team inspector	Science	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students
Bob Shaw	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Lorraine Small	Team inspector	Design technology	N/A
		Information technology	
Patricia Walker	Team inspector	History	N/A
Vernon Williams	Team inspector	Geography	N/A

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Valley Park Community school opened in September 1998. It is a mixed non-selective secondary modern school and is smaller than usual with 772 students on roll. The numbers in the sixth form increased this year but it is still small with 69 students on roll. In Year 7 there are a significantly higher number of boys than girls and in Year 12, there are almost twice as many girls as boys. Students come from a wide range of backgrounds and a large number of primary schools. The majority of students come from white, European backgrounds with a small number from homes in which English is an additional language. A few of these students are at early stages of learning English. The percentage of students entitled to free school meals is broadly average at 14.3 per cent. A higher than usual proportion of students are on the register of special educational needs, 43 per cent and 27 of these students have a statement of special educational need. The attainment on entry is below average as the school is a secondary modern one within a selective system. Numbers are increasing quickly as it becomes a first choice for parents from a wide area.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school has been open for just over a year and in many aspects is already an effective school. The leadership is very strong and the headteacher, senior management team and governors have set a clear and appropriate agenda for the school's development. The raising of standards is a high priority and is supported by the rigorous review of teaching and effective use of assessment to set targets for students. The collaborative style of management, which involves all staff in contributing to the decisions made by the school is developing a close and cohesive team. One effect of this is the consistency in teaching. Teaching is good overall and there are many strengths which ensure that most students learn well. Achievement in English is high for a secondary modern school. The school is in line to achieve its target of 36 per cent A* to C grades next year, which is an improvement on the results of 1999. Attainment in mathematics and science is below average, but the school has recognised this and is working hard to improve standards. Value for money is satisfactory overall despite the current lack of cost effectiveness of the sixth form.

What the school does well

- There is strong leadership from the headteacher and the senior management team.
- Standards in English are high when compared with schools of a similar intake of students.
- Review procedures are highly effective and are having a positive impact on standards.
- Teaching is good overall and there is little difference between the key stages.
- The mentoring system is contributing to students' progress, including the progress of students with special educational needs.
- The community makes a positive contribution to the school.
- Students are cared for well in a safe environment.
- Parents are kept involved in their children's learning.

What could be improved

- Attainment in mathematics and science is below that of English and progress in some aspects of technology is unsatisfactory.
- The attainment of boys is below that of girls.
- A significant number of students have poor skills of literacy and of speaking.
- Spiritual development is weak.
- The behaviour and attitudes of a small number of younger students, mainly boys, adversely affects their achievement.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

This is the first inspection of the school.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	n/a	n/a	E	E
A-levels/AS-levels	n/a	n/a	n/a	

Key	
very high	A*
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E
low	E*

In 1999, the students taking national examinations had been in the school for less than a year so the results are not a fair reflection of the school.

The school has a higher number of students with special educational needs than do most schools. The average total GCSE points score in 1999 was well below most schools and schools with students of a similar background. However, looking only at A* to C grades, performance was in line with other secondary modern schools. Achievement in English was good and girls achieved highly in religious studies, German, single award science, history, English literature and information studies. The school has set higher targets for A* to C grades next year and is in line to meet them.

At the end of Key Stage 3, standards overall were in line with secondary modern schools, but were below those of most schools in the country as a whole. In English, students achieved relatively highly and standards were in line with the national average, and well above those of secondary modern schools. Boys achieved highly, their performance was above the national average. In mathematics and science, standards were close to the average for schools that take students of a similar range of attainment but were below the national average.

The numbers in the sixth form are too small to make valid comparison with national data. The small number of students taking courses achieved well.

The inspection found that attainment is improving in all subjects, due to effective leadership by the senior management team and heads of department. At Key Stages 3 and 4, boys achieve less well than girls, particularly in literacy. The school has recognised this and is developing methods to improve the achievement of boys and all departments are beginning to use a common approach to raising standards of literacy. These methods are beginning to have a positive effect on attainment.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Satisfactory
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Satisfactory
Personal development and relationships	Satisfactory
Attendance	Satisfactory

The majority of students have positive attitudes towards their work and behave well. A significant number of students, particularly in Year 7 or in the lower sets, have poor attitudes and sometimes behave in an immature way. Students respond well to the many ways that the school uses to encourage them to attend and be punctual. Relationships are positive generally, with the exception of the small number of students who sometimes show disrespect to other students or adults.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	good	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.

Effective monitoring of teaching has led to a high degree of consistency and teaching is good overall at Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form. Ninety-five per cent of teaching was satisfactory or better and 17 per cent was very good or better. The teaching of English is good at both key stages. At both key stages, teaching of science and mathematics is satisfactory. Teaching of drama, geography, history, art, German, French and vocational courses is good overall.

Strengths in teaching include a high level of subject expertise, effective planning and a good use of resources and time in lessons. These strengths help pupils to learn by motivating them. Most teachers ensure that pupils behave well. Very few unsatisfactory lessons were observed. In these lessons, the weaknesses were low expectations, unsatisfactory management of behaviour and little opportunity for pupils to develop independent learning skills.

The school has responded to its concern about unsatisfactory literacy skills, particularly amongst the boys, by putting into place an approach to literacy which is being used effectively by all teachers. Numeracy skills are taught inconsistently across departments. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language is effective.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum.	Good. The curriculum is balanced and broad, although the small size of the sixth form restricts choice.
Provision for students with special educational needs.	Good. Effective procedures are in place and students are supported well.
Provision for students with English as an additional language.	Satisfactory. Students receive thoughtful support.
Provision for students' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.	Satisfactory overall. Relationships and the provision for moral development are good, provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory.
How well the school cares for its students.	There are many strengths and the care for students is very good.

The school works effectively with parents, involving them in their child's education. A particular strength in provision is the school's links with the community, which enhance the learning of students. The provision for moral development is good, but for spiritual development is unsatisfactory as there are few opportunities for reflection. Although the school raises the awareness of students about the Western European culture, less is done to raise awareness of Britain as a multi-cultural society. The school does not meet statutory requirements for the daily act of collective worship for all and religious

education is not taught in the sixth form.

There are many strengths in the way the school cares for its students. A major one which is helping to raise attainment is the rigorous use of assessment to set targets which are then monitored by staff and discussed with parents and their children at a meeting which is held each term.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff.	Very good. There is a clear direction for the growth of the school and all staff with management responsibilities lead effectively.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities.	Good. Governors are involved in setting a direction for the school and contribute well to its growth. They are developing a strategic view.
The school's evaluation of its performance.	Good. Monitoring procedures are thorough and are beginning to have a positive impact on standards.
The strategic use of resources.	Good. Resources are well deployed and the school monitors its spending carefully.

A key feature of the management is the rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching and the progress that students are making towards their targets. Another strength is the school development plan and the method that is used to draw it up which involves all staff and governors, evaluation and review. The resulting plan is used effectively to move the school forward.

The school deploys the resources available to it effectively and ensures that it gets the best value when ordering. It monitors the outcomes of budget decisions thoughtfully.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students do well at school and make good progress. 2. The school promotes good attitudes. 3. Parents are contacted immediately if there is a problem. 4. The firm handling of behaviour. 5. Staff are easy to approach and are always available, even in the evening. 6. The mentoring system and regular meetings with their child's mentor. 7. The teaching is good and teachers expect students to work hard. 	<p>A small number of parents think that their children do not get the right amount of work to do at home.</p>

The inspection team found that parents are well justified in their views about what pleases them about the school. Homework is set regularly by all teachers.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. As the school is a secondary modern within the selective system of the local education authority, attainment on entry to the school is below average. Also, almost half the students have special educational needs which is far higher than in most schools. As a result, standards are below those of most schools. However, effective action by the senior management team is leading to improving standards in most subjects and the majority of students make satisfactory progress and achieve well because of the consistency of teaching. Lower attaining students make good progress as they receive effective support in lessons from teachers and support staff. The few students for whom English is an additional language also make good progress as they receive thoughtful support. In science and aspects of design and technology, higher attaining students do not make the progress they should as the work is often too easy for them.
2. The results attained in 1999 are not a fair reflection of Valley Park Community School as students had started their courses in different schools and were following a wide range of courses and syllabi. At GCSE, the average points score was well below that of schools that take students of a similar ability range. The number of students gaining five or more A* to C grades in comparison with similar schools was average, as was the number gaining 1 or more grades of A* to G. Girls achieved highly but the performance of boys was poor. The school has taken steps to raise the attainment of boys which is having a positive impact on standards in English and history.
3. The numbers in the sixth form were too small to make valid comparisons with national data. However, the majority of students gained an award in GNVQ.
4. At the end of Key Stage 3, standards in 1999 in English were in line with the national average and well above those of secondary modern schools. The standards attained by boys were above the national average and those of girls was close to the national average. In mathematics and science, standards were close to the average for secondary modern schools but below those of all schools across the country as a whole. Boys achieved well below the national average in science.
5. The school has set appropriate targets for GCSE next year and is in line to attain them because of the strong leadership from the senior management team.
6. In English, standards are in line with the national average and students make good progress at both key stages. This is because the department is effectively led and monitoring is used well. Boys achieve highly because the department has looked at research and is using this to develop methods to motivate boys. Other features which contribute to the relative high achievement in English are skilful planning which builds up students' knowledge, skills and understanding and the use of assessment to set targets for each student followed up by rigorous monitoring of these targets. Teachers encourage students to plan and edit their work so that their skills in writing are close to average. At the end of both key stages, skills of listening are better developed than those of speaking, except for higher attaining students whose skills are good in both. Skills in reading are in line with the national average and lower attaining students achieve well, for example, they could read extracts from Shakespeare with the support of their teacher.
7. Although students perform well in English, their basic skills of literacy in other subjects, particularly amongst the boys, are weak, especially in spelling and punctuation. The school has recognised this as a high priority and all departments are using the policy that has been developed to improve basic skills. This is starting to have a positive effect on attainment.
8. Standards in mathematics are below average for secondary modern schools. Last year, the department suffered from many changes of staff but staffing is now more stable. The department is developing a good structure to lessons and this is beginning to raise standards and to ensure that students make satisfactory progress, although progress at Key Stage 4 is unsatisfactory as new approaches in the department have not had time to have an impact.

Skills of numeracy are taught well in mathematics lessons, but they are inconsistently taught in other subjects. This has been recognised by the senior management team who have it as a future priority on the school development plan. In food technology, number skills are applied well and in art students make good use of their skills of measuring. Graphical representation is weak in geography at Key Stage 3 and opportunities are missed in science to develop skills of numeracy.

9. Standards in science are below the national average but are in line with those of secondary modern schools and are improving due to effective leadership. Students make satisfactory progress overall, but progress of higher attaining students is unsatisfactory as they are given work that does not challenge them and that of lower attaining students is sometimes unsatisfactory as the work does not match their needs. By the end of Key Stage 3, students understand chemical symbols, and by the end of Key Stage 4, many know how to use chemical equations. There is too much reliance on text books and insufficient practical work which is impeding the progress that students make.
10. In information and communication technology at the end of Key Stage 3, standards are in line with what is expected of fourteen year olds and students make satisfactory progress. They use a range of software packages competently and increase their knowledge of how to use spreadsheets and the internet. By the end of Key Stage 4, girls attain more highly than boys. The school has recognised this and is putting methods into place to raise the achievement of boys. In the sixth form, students present their work well using desk top publishing skilfully. There is insufficient use of spreadsheets and databases to represent information.
11. In other subjects, information and communication technology is used well in history, science, geography, mathematics and art. In science for example, students use data logging skills well and in mathematics they use spreadsheets and programs to support their learning of geometry. It is insufficiently used in religious education, modern foreign languages, English and music.
12. Attainment in religious education is below that of the locally agreed syllabus, but students achieve satisfactorily in relation to their prior attainment. At the end of Key Stage 4, attainment in the target of learning from religion is better than learning about religion. At the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is broadly in line with what is expected of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. Students' knowledge and understanding of religion often lacks depth.
13. At the end of Key Stage 4, standards in food technology are average when compared with similar schools but in other areas of technology, standards are below average, sometimes because of unsatisfactory teaching. The department has put methods into place that are designed to raise achievement. At the end of Key Stage 3, standards are in line with what is expected of fourteen year olds. A strength is their ability to follow the process of design. Their ability to analyse and draw conclusions about existing products is limited.
14. Attainment in history is improving at both key stages and is in line with what is expected of fourteen and sixteen year olds. This is because the department is effectively led and the planning is thorough and ensures that the subject is interesting and relevant, which enables the students to develop good knowledge, skills and understanding. At the end of Key Stage 3, students are hampered by their weak skills of literacy which are affecting the standards of their work. One feature of this is insufficient detail in written work. The department is developing effective strategies to deal with this, and is particularly successful at motivating boys.
15. Standards in geography, although below average at the end of both key stages, are improving since last year because of carefully structured and imaginative teaching and a wide range of methods, all of which motivate the students to want to learn. At the end of Key Stage 3, most students have a thorough understanding of geographical skills and vocabulary. Most students use and interpret maps successfully. An area for improvement is students' use of graphs to represent information. At the end of Key Stage 4, most students apply geographical skills well to their work.
16. Students make good progress at both key stages in modern foreign languages and although standards are below the national average, students achieve in line with their prior attainment. At the end of Key Stage 4, many students have a good understanding of grammar. In the younger classes there is little difference in the enthusiasm of boys and girls for the subject which is leading to high achievement. At Key Stage 4, many students lack confidence in their

skills of speaking.

17. In art, standards are in line with national averages at the end of both key stages and students make satisfactory progress. In the sixth form, students achieve highly, particularly in two-dimensional work. At Key Stage 3, there are strengths in students' work in ceramics. Attainment is in line with what is expected of students at the age of fourteen in music and they make satisfactory progress. Their rhythmic skills are particularly well developed. No student takes music in Year 11. Those in Year 10 are sensitive to how performances might be improved and their listening skills are well developed.
18. At the end of Key Stage 3, pupils make good progress and attain in line with what is expected of pupils of this age group. Currently, low standards in physical education at the end of Key Stage 4 are the result of students' prior experience of a limited curriculum with a strong focus on netball and football. Progress at Key Stage 4 is unsatisfactory as a result.
19. The sixth form has grown since last year and although standards are below average, achievement is good, taking into account students' prior attainment. This is because many teachers of GNVQ have high expectations of what the students can achieve. Students study a range of vocational courses and their coursework shows that they are in line with GNVQ completion rates although the standards are below the national average.
20. Inspectors found in all subjects that standards are rising in response to the high expectations that senior management have of their staff and students, and to the commitment to high attainment on the part of all staff.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

21. The school has taken a number of effective steps to rectify serious shortcomings in attitudes, behaviour, personal development and attendance which were evident when it opened. It has been successful in achieving improvements in all these areas. There is, however, a significant minority of instances of unsatisfactory attitudes, particularly amongst boys in Year 7, and in lower sets.
22. The attitudes and behaviour of students, including those with special educational needs, seen during the inspection were at least satisfactory in 91 per cent of lessons. They were good or better in 21 per cent of lessons. Parents are pleased with attitudes and values the school promotes and appreciate the speed with which instances of unacceptable behaviour are dealt with.
23. There were many examples during the inspection of positive attitudes to learning and good relationships between students and between students and adults. These were used effectively to enable students to make good progress in their learning. In a top set Year 7 mathematics lesson, for example, students had very positive attitudes and were keen to question the teacher in order to extend their learning. Very good relationships in a Year 8 mathematics lesson enabled the students to maintain interest and participation in their learning. In the majority of lessons students took account of the views of others, for example, in a Year 11 English lesson where they listened carefully to the teacher and each other, responding appropriately.
24. Where attitudes were judged to be unsatisfactory, students did not have the necessary classroom skills to maintain concentration or to make useful contributions to the lesson through discussions or questions and answers. In these lessons, some students, particularly boys in Year 7, and in lower attaining sets, showed little interest in their work. On occasions, but not always, unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour tended to occur when students had no interest in their work. In a Year 10 boys' lesson in personal and social education for example, students could not see the purpose of what they were being asked to do, and as a result very little was achieved.
25. In many lessons, the isolated poor behaviour of individual students, which threatened to disrupt the learning of others, was dealt with very effectively by the consistent use of the school's behaviour policy. However, in a few cases, the teachers' strategies for managing behaviour were ineffective.
26. The generally good, although sometimes passive, behaviour of the majority of students in

classes and assemblies, enables learning to take place in a constructive atmosphere. Observations of behaviour outside the school showed that this good behaviour continued when students arrived and left. Behaviour was a significant problem when the school first opened, and as a result there was a high level of exclusions last year. The rate is now dropping. Students say there is little bullying in the school and both they and their parents report that any incidents are dealt with swiftly and effectively.

27. The personal development of students is very well supported through termly interviews between parents, students and form tutors, where all aspects of the students' education are discussed. Many students say that they appreciate the wide range of extra-curricular activities that is provided, although the number attending them has fallen since the beginning of the current academic year. There are also limited opportunities in lessons for students to take responsibility for their own learning, but instances were seen where they were trusted to carry out tasks on their own, for example in a Year 7 lesson.
28. Attendance is just satisfactory, but is beginning to rise. In the last reporting year, it was close to the overall national average, although authorised absence is slightly above national figures. Unauthorised absence is below. Nine out of ten parents who responded to the parents' questionnaire said that their children enjoy coming to school and most arrived on time during the inspection. Lessons started promptly at the beginning of each session and during the day when students had to move from room to room.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

29. The rigorous monitoring of teaching over the past year is having a positive impact on the quality of teaching which is highly consistent across most subjects and key stages. Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory or better and there is little difference between the key stages or the sixth form. The amount of teaching which was satisfactory or better was 95 per cent and of this, 61 per cent was good. 17 per cent of teaching was very good or better. The very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching that was observed was due to individual difficulties, rather than to a problem across the whole school.
30. The teaching of English, drama, geography, history, art, music, vocational courses, French and German is good overall. Other subjects are taught satisfactorily. There are inconsistencies in the teaching of personal and social education, which is because some teachers have greater expertise in this area than others.
31. A consistent strength across all departments is the subject expertise of all teachers, apart from in personal and social education. Planning is effective and often thoughtful as lessons are designed so that new ideas are taught in a clear sequence. These two features enable students to acquire new knowledge and skills and thus make good progress. One example was in geography in Year 7 when students were taught about settlements, using Maidstone as an area. In this lesson, the planning enabled students to acquire new knowledge about their local area and to develop their understanding of how to use maps for information.
32. Another strength observed in many lessons was the use of sensitive and well planned questions which extended the learning of all students. In a Year 13 business education lesson about profitability ratios, the teacher used effective question and answer methods to ensure that students had understood the ideas. In a GNVQ advanced lesson in which students monitored the cardio-respiratory system at different levels of physical activity, the teacher stretched the students' theoretical understanding and encouraged the development of critical thinking by using highly focused questions. These lessons also demonstrated the high expectations that teachers have of their students, a feature observed in many lessons.
33. In most lessons, teachers manage the behaviour of students well which enables them all to listen and to learn. Relationships in most classrooms are good, which gives students the confidence to try out their own ideas in a safe and supportive environment. When learning about sound in a Year 8 science lesson for example, students were confident to suggest examples of different sounds as the teacher responded well to what they had to say. In a Year 7 mathematics lesson which followed up learning about three-dimensional shapes, the very good relationships were a contributory factor to the highly effective learning environment. In a Year 7 English lesson, the high quality of the interaction with the students encouraged them to think about the subject and to contribute to the lesson.

34. A feature of the teaching which is particularly helpful to lower attaining students is the clear explanations and the effective guidance that most teachers offer their students. In a Year 11 physical education lesson, the clear and useful introduction ensured that students knew exactly what was expected of them. In a Year 9 English lesson with a low attaining group, the students understood the themes within *Romeo and Juliet* because of the skilful explanations of the teacher. Another strength which helps all students is the sharing of the purpose of the lesson with students. In a German lesson which taught vocabulary to do with towns, the students were helped to focus on their learning by this method. This feature was particularly helpful in a Year 12 leisure and tourism lesson in which students were studying at different levels. The clear explanation at the beginning of the lesson about what was expected of them helped them to learn well.
35. The time in lessons is used well, although there were a few examples of a late start to lessons as students arrived late. A Year 9 science class learning about pressure was motivated by the brisk pace of the lesson. In geography, the use of deadlines sustained the momentum of the lesson. Resources are also used well to maintain enthusiasm. There were examples of this in many lessons. The use of demonstration in both music and physical education had a positive effect on students' learning. Homework is set regularly by all teachers and is usually used as part of the lesson. Marking of all work is assiduous, although there are examples of written comments that do not suggest how students can improve their work.
36. The literacy policy is followed by most departments and there are good examples of subject specific vocabulary being taught effectively and of structures for writing being used to give students an idea of how to set out their work.
37. The teaching of students with special educational needs is effective and support staff work sensitively in lessons with the students for whom they have responsibility. In a keyboard lesson in music, students with special educational needs contributed well as they received good support from the teacher. In an English lesson, the support assistants ensured that students could keep up with the rest by sensitively explaining the ideas of the lesson.
38. Students for whom English is an additional language are supported well. The external provision is thoughtful and the teacher ensures that students are helped where they have the most difficulty. One student had the confidence to respond in a history lesson because of the effective support and was delighted, as were the two staff.
39. There are a few inconsistencies in teaching, mainly within the personal and education lessons. Although many are successfully taught, a few were not as the teachers did not have the expertise in the subject. An area for improvement in a few departments is the teaching of independent study skills. This is particularly so in the sixth form where students sometimes do not have the skills to think for themselves. Another area for development in technology and science is the match of work for higher attaining students as it is sometimes too easy for them and does not extend their learning. More practical work in science would extend the learning of students. Although the way in which teachers manage the behaviour of students is generally good, there are a number of occasions when the unsatisfactory behaviour and attitudes of a few students, mainly younger boys, impedes both their learning and that of the class.
40. The consistent quality of teaching is a major factor in raising the standards of the school.

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

41. Since it opened in 1998, Valley Park School has planned and organised its curriculum well in order to match the needs of all its students. It has carefully looked at the varying needs of students coming from other schools to finish their education as well as those who now form the school's normal intake. As students' needs change, so the curriculum is reviewed to match those needs. For example, Year 11 in 1998/99 needed two separate curricula to accommodate students from different schools. Each of Years 10 and 11 have different curricula, also adjusted to their needs.
42. The curriculum across Key Stages 3 and 4 is broad and balanced. At Key Stage 3, the curriculum is well matched to students' needs. In addition, students have the choice of either French or German on entry to the school in Year 7. The curriculum in Key Stage 4 is developing a strong set of vocational courses that students can choose alongside a balanced set of GCSE courses. English is a strength in the curriculum as is that for students with special educational needs across the key stages. Students in Year 11 take double award science and GCSE music is taught outside normal curriculum time due to small numbers. However, the majority of Year 10 students take only single award science that potentially restricts access to further education in science and engineering. A daily act of worship is not held for all students as required by statute.
43. The school also offers courses at sixth form level. These include mainly GNVQ courses such as health and social care, business education, leisure and tourism and art and design, as well as a small number of A-level courses. Numbers in the sixth form are at present small, which means that this provision is not yet cost-effective but there are signs that numbers may increase in the next academic year. Religious education is not taught in the sixth form as statutorily required.
44. The school has put a literacy policy into place as staff quickly realised that many students had difficulty in this area and this was impeding their access to the curriculum. The approach to literacy is being used consistently well across all departments. As yet, promotion of numeracy across the whole curriculum does not have the same consistency. Effective measures are taken by mathematics teachers to maintain and strengthen number skills. As well as number frequently appearing as a main topic in teaching programmes, it is standard practice that all mathematics lessons start with five short questions which provides a regular means of revisiting basic knowledge and skills.
45. There is good provision for extra-curricular activities with staff providing over thirty clubs and activities per week. These range from glass painting to chess, from board games to testing models in science. Clubs are also available for information and communication technology and art. Sports activities cover table tennis and basket ball for both girls and boys as well as team sports such as hockey and rugby. Students have access to information and communication technology support software and to revision sessions. One drawback to activities after school, noted by parents, is the prompt departure of the buses for those students living further afield.
46. The range of activities is open to all students and curriculum courses are open to all who have the ability to profit from them. The school has regard to equal opportunities but, in its brief history, has yet to encompass its ideas in a formal policy.
47. All students have personal and social education lessons as part of their curriculum. These are well organised and are taught by form tutors every week. They cover, amongst other areas, subjects such as sex education, work related issues and revision skills. Much of the teaching is good but there is some inconsistency. The school is aware of the need for further training of form tutors and for the monitoring of teaching in this area. Drugs education and citizenship form parts of the course, some of this successfully taught by outside speakers such as those from the police force.
48. Work experience is also well organised and every student at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form benefits from two weeks' work experience. Even students in Year 11 in 1998/99 had some work experience organised at very short notice in their very first term at the school. The

personal and social education programme contributes by helping students to prepare personal statements and letters of application as well as promoting interview and presentational skills.

49. The school makes effective use of local resources and students are supported by good careers advice. The careers library is of a good standard, newly provided and outfitted by the school since its opening. Curriculum departments are also developing work-related links; for example, the history department links its history of medicine topic with a modern day doctor's surgery. Sixth form students on GNVQ courses have links with a local Stakis hotel and the Maidstone hospital.
50. The school has very good links with the community, including industry, which enhance the curriculum and enable students to make good progress in their learning.
51. Valley Park Community School is successfully building links with a wide range of primary schools. However, there has not yet been time to develop the projects between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3 teachers that the school would like to be able to do. The school works with higher education institutions and currently accepts ten student teachers. Links with further educational institutions post-16 are weak.

Personal development

52. The school makes satisfactory provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its students. It succeeds in providing a purposeful learning environment. The overall provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory, for moral development good, and for social and cultural development satisfactory.
53. Opportunities for spiritual development are supported in the context of the work of subjects such as English, geography, history and religious education. In a Year 8 religious education lesson, for example, all students were fully involved in an exercise where they had to imagine a special place and how they would feel if it was destroyed. In English, spiritual moments in drama and in the study of poetry also lead students to a better understanding of themselves and self-awareness. However, opportunities for spiritual development across the school are not fully developed and this leads to inconsistencies and missed opportunities to engage students in reflection of their own and other people's lives and beliefs. Groups of students have opportunities during the week to attend assemblies. These tend to focus mainly on moral and social issues and there is often insufficient time for reflection or to join in prayer. Little use is made of form tutor time to reflect on spiritual and moral issues and little opportunity is offered to students for a more active involvement in assemblies and form tutor time. In assemblies, students tend to listen passively. The school does not fully comply with the requirements for a daily act of collective worship for all.
54. Students' moral development is well supported through the good standards of moral values which permeate the work of the school. Students know what is right and wrong and what is expected of them within the school. Students are encouraged to consider reasons for and consequences of actions. Staff are good role models and promote principles which distinguish right from wrong. The school effectively fosters values such as honesty, fairness, tolerance and respect for self and others. This is reflected in physical education lessons where students show respect for the capabilities of one another in practical activities when involved in pair work coaching and peer evaluation. Environmental issues are considered in geography and in history students were effectively led in discussing civil rights and racial tension in the USA thus enhancing their learning. Religious education lessons provide good opportunities to discuss and consider moral issues. All this also helps develop students' speaking and listening skills.
55. Provision for the social development of students is satisfactory. The school has taken the conscious decision to concentrate on developing good standards of behaviour. Students are given good opportunities to relate positively to one another and to adults in the school. Relationships are good and are based on mutual respect. Students are generally polite and friendly and are able to work co-operatively in most lessons, for example, good examples of group work were seen in music, religious education, drama and English. In mathematics students are successfully encouraged to be considerate to others and to react responsibly when, for example, others give 'wrong' answers. Although not always well taught, some aspects of the personal and social education programme also develop students' awareness of social issues thus enhancing their all round personal and social development. Opportunities for students to take responsibility in the life of the school are not yet well developed.

56. The provision made for students to appreciate their own culture is sound and there are a range of curriculum opportunities to develop a knowledge and understanding of other cultures. In music, for example, students study world music such as Indian raga and Chinese music. There are visits to museums as part of the history curriculum. The school has had visitors from Russia and Africa in assemblies where they have discussed their lives. In English lessons the analysis of popular culture gives students a better understanding of advertising and journalism. There is though, a lack of opportunity for students to develop their awareness of the cultural diversity in contemporary British society. In one religious education lesson, for example, there is sometimes the assumption that all students are Christian.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

57. The school cares very well for its students in both the pastoral care it provides and the measures it takes to monitor their academic progress. All the information gathered is used to set targets for individual improvement.
58. The care and support provided is underpinned by a range of useful, effective policies to monitor behaviour, attendance, academic performance and to support discipline, attendance, health and safety. The policies are applied consistently and understood by the vast majority of students who believe they are applied fairly. They are reviewed regularly, often involving, students, parents and governors, as well as staff.
59. Arrangements for maintaining discipline, for example, have been improved and both parents and students say these are working well. The school had identified the need to improve attendance and has developed very detailed procedures for recording and monitoring attendance. These are beginning to be effective.
60. The arrangements for gathering information on what students know and can do through consistent and regular testing and monitoring are very good. This information is used very well to plan for the needs of individual students. Targets are set and reviewed each term and are discussed with students and their parents at termly interviews with tutors. Students and their parents find this process extremely helpful.
61. Students are also very well supported through the good use of outside agencies. The local education authority's behaviour support service, for example, gives valuable help to small groups of students, and business mentors are used to counsel under-achieving pupils in Years 10 and 11. Further help is now being made available by Year 9 and Year 12 students who have been trained as peer counsellors under the Safe Schools' Initiative. The school has secure systems in place for child protection and the headteacher has recently completed training in child protection. It is planned to extend the training to all members of staff.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

62. The school sets a high priority on establishing an effective partnership with parents and has very largely been successful. Parents support the school in all aspects of its work and take advantage of the many opportunities to become involved in their children's learning. Students, too, appreciate the efforts made by the school to involve their parents. The successful partnership with parents is an important factor in the school's growing popularity.
63. The inspection survey and meeting for parents showed a high level of support for all aspects of the school's work. Concerns about the amount of homework, however, were expressed by a large number of parents who responded to the questionnaire. Evidence gathered during the inspection showed that appropriate amounts of homework are set in each year group in each subject.
64. The school's high expectations of parental involvement in their children's learning are made clear in the home-school agreement. Parents are encouraged to raise any concerns with the school at any time and can contact it after-hours on a mobile phone link.
65. The key to the effective partnership that now exists is the termly meeting between students,

parents, and tutors which is used to review all aspects of the students education, both pastoral and academic. Targets for improvement are set, explained to parents, and reviewed at the next meeting. Attendance at these 20-minute meetings is very high at around 95 per cent. Every effort is made to contact those parents who do not attend. These good arrangements have a positive impact on the work of the school and make an important contribution to the students' learning.

66. Parents are well informed of the school's work through a clear and useful prospectus, regular newsletters that cover new initiatives and seek parents' views on specific areas. This information is used to inform policy making. In addition to the termly meetings with staff, parents are also well informed of their children's progress through useful annual reports. These contain good information on effort, attainment and attendance with targets for improvement.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

67. The overall leadership of the school is good and is the principal reason for its effectiveness. In its second year of operation the school is growing and developing well. This is because of the clear direction set by the headteacher, senior management team and the governors, and the dedication and commitment of the staff who work together as a team to decide on priorities for development and to implement them. Non-teaching staff make an effective contribution to the good ethos of the school. The school offers a challenging and stimulating environment in which to work.
68. The leadership of the headteacher and the senior management team is very good. The headteacher has set a clear direction for the growth of the school. She has high expectations of all staff and a rigorous approach to raising standards. Her management style is an inclusive one, so that all staff share in the decision making processes of the school. This has resulted in good team work as was observed on several occasions during staff meetings. Thoughtful and appropriate priorities have been determined and very good structures are developing to manage the school. The senior management team is effective in carrying out its roles and responsibilities.
69. The governors are fully involved in setting a direction for the school to grow and they have a good knowledge of the school based on their visits. Governors are allocated a priority of the school development plan and therefore have a focus for their work. As yet, formal systems for reporting back on visits are not in place, but governors have established good procedures for working and are developing a range of monitoring systems.
70. Heads of department give effective leadership. Each is expected to monitor the quality of provision of their subject, including the observation of teaching. All have done this and although there are inconsistencies in the quality of their evaluations teaching, they have nonetheless made a good start.
71. The school development plan is a thoughtful and comprehensive document that is used well to ensure that the school meets the priorities that have been established to move it forward. All staff and governors are involved in determining the priorities. Each priority has a member of staff assigned to it and it is his or her responsibility to review the progress towards its completion. Time is allowed for this within the school day, and the quality of the reviews is evidence that this time is used well.
72. The biggest factor in the school's effectiveness is the rigorous approach to monitoring and review. Each member of staff was made aware on appointment that this is a key feature of the school. A sensitive approach was used which involved all staff observing another teacher and then contributing to a staff discussion on the strengths and weaknesses they had observed. This was followed by senior staff observing teachers for whom they have responsibility. This has created accountability within an environment of openness and trust. All staff are involved and contribute together to the development of effective teaching strategies. The reports of the monitoring are held centrally and action is taken to support staff in improving their teaching. The progress of students is also reviewed rigorously using test and examination data. Their progress is carefully monitored and involves parents.

Financial planning and management

73. The school budgets systematically and well for all expenditure. As the new school was established, the governing body and the senior management team set clear priorities, including the improvement of the accommodation, effective monitoring of teaching and increased resources for information and communication technology. In all its budgeting decisions, the school seeks the best value for money possible. Tenders are obtained for all goods and services over £1,000 and there are many examples of prudent financial decisions being taken that have saved money and freed funds for other areas of development. School development planning runs in tandem with financial planning and budget setting, so that development priorities are carefully costed and the school is certain at the beginning of the development cycle that the funds will be available to carry through the improvements.
74. The quality of educational provision has benefited from the wise and careful management of the budget. Funds have been allocated successfully to areas of priority. These in turn have proved to be effective in raising standards and the quality of experience that students enjoy, for example, the improvements in information and communication technology resources have ensured that students rarely have to share equipment, as they had to before. The new and the refurbished computers run software that was beyond the capacity of the equipment previously, allowing students to reach the higher levels of the National Curriculum Programme of Study and GCSE. Improvements to the accommodation have made the school a more attractive environment for both students and staff. Students respect the buildings and letting income has trebled.
75. Financial control and administration are very efficient. The recommendations of the latest auditors' report, which were favourable, have been acted upon fully. The systems for financial administration are unobtrusive, efficient and meet the needs of teaching and non-teaching staff. Systems are effective and secure without being unduly cumbersome or time-consuming, so that they support teachers in their work rather than adding unnecessarily to their burdens and taking them away from their principal roles. The finance officer works very efficiently to ensure that the headteacher, governing body and the senior management team have all the information they need about the budget in order to monitor the school's finances effectively.
76. The sixth form is expensive to maintain. The costs are not met by the income from budget allowed for these students and other areas of the school are subsidising their education. This is partly because some groups are too small to be financially viable. In English, for example, because fewer students took the course than were expected, there are two groups in the lower sixth, each with only three students. This is too high a student/teacher ratio to be financially viable. There are valid strategic reasons for the school to want to develop a sixth form, in order, for example, to make the school more attractive in the 'market place' and also to provide role models for younger students. Numbers are growing. Nevertheless, it does not provide good value for money at present.
77. The school makes good and effective use of new technology. The library contains good information and communications technology hardware and software, including CD ROM and internet access for individual research. Information technology is used effectively for administration.
78. The funds available to the school are allocated appropriately. The funding for the education of students with special educational needs, for example, is spent and accounted for correctly. Some spending decisions are monitored formally, through the monitoring and review of the school development plan. There is regular review of the effectiveness of spending decisions at an informal level by heads of department and other budget holders, as well as by the senior management team. The outcomes of spending meet the initial objectives and to ensure that this is the case, these objectives are formally monitored by a senior management team member, each of whom is responsible for the implementation and review of a number of such initiatives.
79. The school makes effective use of additional grants related to the school's provision. A good example was the funding for the literacy school in the summer. A successful event, fully evaluated, it resulted in students entering the school in the following September already knowing the school and many members of staff, enthusiastic and having made progress in their learning.

80. The best value principles of comparison, challenge, consultation and competition are applied effectively in the school's management and use of resources. The senior management team and the governing body take account of all information available to them to analyse their effectiveness compared with similar schools. They check carefully to ensure that contracts, such as that for school meals, are cost effective and take care to ensure that resources available outside of school hours are managed carefully. There is adequate consultation on major decisions affecting the curriculum and budget priorities. These consultations involve governors, parents and students, where appropriate. The school is giving satisfactory value for money.

Staffing, accommodation and resources

81. The school has sufficient appropriately qualified teachers to meet curriculum needs. In mathematics there has only recently been a recovery from a succession of staffing difficulties that had an adverse effect on standards. In science there are not sufficient technicians to fulfil the necessary requirements across the range of laboratories.
82. The requirement for staff appraisal is met through the school's own ambitious programme of professional review that is supported by a well-structured programme of review meetings between teachers and their line managers. This is coupled with an extensive programme to improve teaching by observing lessons and providing feedback to teachers on their strengths and weaknesses. The wholeheartedness with which teachers participate in these arrangements is a very positive feature of the school. Overall support is provided by a carefully planned programme of professional development. These measures, together with a collaborative style of management that values the views of all staff, have established a strong and cohesive team sharing a common aspiration to raise the effectiveness of teaching and learning. The thoroughness of the school's provision for professional development is exemplified in the successful induction programme for staff new to the school and including those first joining the profession.
83. Accommodation in the school is good overall. The new buildings together with the refurbished interior of the existing premises now provide a safe, bright and attractive environment for learning that is fully respected by students. The buildings are well maintained. Subject classrooms are grouped within the school to facilitate professional collaboration. The areas surrounding the school and including its playing fields are spacious. The gymnasium is small and restricts the progress that older students can make particularly in basketball. The adjoining showers are modern and afford good standards of privacy.
84. Overall there are satisfactory resources to support teaching and learning. In geography the resources are good. The school fully recognises the importance of information technology: it has invested heavily and sensibly in this area both to assist day-to-day administration and to ensure good provision of computers and software to support students' learning. The provision of textbooks is sufficient for class use but in a few subjects is not sufficient to enable books to be loaned to students. Consequently in science and mathematics, the students are denied this support for independent learning.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

85. The first four issues have been identified by the school in its development plan and the headteacher, governors and staff should continue to focus on them along with the fifth in order to continue to raise attainment and develop the ethos of the school;
- Raise standards in science, mathematics and technology by consistently using the monitoring procedures of the school to ensure that expectations of what students can achieve are high and that there is a consistency of good practice. (paragraphs 1, 4, 8, 9, 13, 44, 70, 122, 123, 124, 129, 131, 136, 145, 146, 147, 149, 160, 167)
 - Raise the attainment of boys by using the methods that have been discussed in all departments and ensuring that activities are designed to interest boys. (paragraphs 2, 10, 15, 103, 106, 121, 129, 130, 159, 165, 173, 186, 187, 188, 210, 213)
 - Improve the literacy and speaking skills of all students by consistently using the literacy policy in all departments and ensuring that the specialist language needs of each subject are taken into account when planning lessons. (paragraphs 6, 7, 14, 16, 106, 107, 108, 109, 119, 121, 161, 166, 168, 169, 175, 196, 211, 213, 218)
 - Improve the behaviour and attitudes of the small number of students who are not interested by making activities motivating and using the methods that are in the school's behaviour policy. (paragraphs 21, 24, 25, 39, 113, 115, 123, 125, 126, 127, 134, 148, 156, 161, 180, 189, 203)
 - Improve the provision for spiritual development by encouraging all staff to include in their planning, moments to reflect on the world beyond the material one and to ensure that assemblies have time for reflection. (paragraphs 42, 52, 53)
86. Minor issues which the governing body may wish to include in their action plan are;
- The inconsistency in the teaching of the personal, social and health education programme. (paragraphs 24, 30, 39, 47, 55)
 - The development of skills of independent study in all years. (paragraphs 27, 39, 93, 161, 162, 169, 174, 216,)
 - The review of the setting arrangements which results in large numbers of boys in the lower sets. (paragraphs 156, 161, 180, 189)
 - The low expectations of higher attaining students in a few subjects. (paragraphs 9, 39, 129, 131, 142, 148, 171, 180)
 - The inconsistency of marking, particularly in the written comments of how students might improve their work. (paragraphs 35, 127, 149, 180, 207)
 - The provision of textbooks in some subjects. (paragraphs 84, 127, 137, 164)
 - The accommodation for physical education. (paragraph 209)
 - The provision of religious education in the sixth form. (paragraphs 43, 214)
 - The use of information and communication technology across the curriculum. (paragraphs 11, 116, 144, 162, 177, 191, 198)
 - Raising awareness that students live in a multicultural society. (paragraphs 56, 213)

The school as a community school

87. The school is a community school and has a clear commitment to develop as a centre of community education. In the relatively short time it has been opened, the school has made very good progress in establishing itself within the local area. It has developed very useful links with the community, including industry, which enhance the curriculum and enable students often to make good progress in their learning.
88. Within the school, training in information technology has been provided for 150 adults, mostly parents and friends of the school. Arrangements are well advanced for an After School Care Club for pre-school children to be available to all members of the community. Volunteers from the community give regular and valuable help in the school's reading recovery group.
89. Useful industry links include the Mid-Kent Education Business Partnership as well as close liaison with local businesses. Two teachers from the mathematics department, for example,

have worked with a local hospital to support numeracy skills amongst the nurses, whilst business provides mentors for Years 10 and 11 students. Effective sporting links in athletics, football, lawn tennis and a local sports' complex, widen the experience of students and extend their learning.

The sixth form

90. The sixth form curriculum is largely vocational in character. Student numbers on General National Vocational (GNVQ) courses have risen steadily since the new school opened. GNVQ courses are currently offered at intermediate and advanced level in the following areas: business studies, health and social care, art and design, and a newly introduced course, leisure and tourism. In addition, an information technology (IT) course at GNVQ, together with a key skills course is planned for September 2000 to cater for all ability levels.
91. In 1999 students on the intermediate business course achieved a completion rate of 100 per cent, well above the national average. In all subjects, intermediate students attained at an average completion rate of 88 per cent, slightly above national averages with a rate of 100 per cent in business and 50 per cent in health and social care. In all of the GNVQ areas, only a minority obtained merit grades, where they planned and evaluated their assignments well, although students achieved satisfactory levels in the key skills of number and IT. There is evidence of oral presentations to achieve communication key skills, but the presentation of written assignments is often spoilt by uncorrected spellings, and written answers at intermediate level in business and health and social care frequently lack depth.
92. Overall, sixth form students make good progress on A level and GNVQ lessons. At A level, students follow courses in science, art, English and geography. The numbers are too small to make judgements about attainment in relation to national data. However, students show concentration and application to their work and are achieving well.
93. In the combined GNVQ classes, progress is variable; it is satisfactory and sometimes good for advanced students but most intermediate students lack the skills at the early stage of the course to independently research in libraries and Internet. In the majority of GNVQ lessons seen, students' progress is supported by close and effective individual guidance from subject teachers. Target setting for students is still in its early stages of development, and is quite often determined by teachers rather than negotiated with students. Most GNVQ students respond well to the increased responsibility sixth form teachers aim to give them. The majority of students organise their work well in lessons and at home. A sizeable minority, however, mostly at intermediate level, are too dependent on teachers to organise their work for them, and in lessons seen do not make the most efficient use of their time. They do not use tutor time to plan their work. However, nearly all students use information technology effectively to improve the presentation of their assignments. Tasks with shorter-term deadlines help students establish more effective work schedules, and the good practice that currently exists in each subject could be shared by other subjects more frequently to include combining small classes more effectively to maximise available teaching time.
94. Sixth form teaching in GNVQ lessons is invariably good when teachers work with one level of GNVQ attainment in the class, either Intermediate or Advanced. Teachers are well organised and plan lessons well, making increasingly good use of local contacts, although business links are still underdeveloped, due mostly to the current lack of a business studies co-ordinator. Teachers bring in visitors to develop students' ideas of possible careers and to develop subject understanding in all subjects, GNVQ teachers are particularly experienced, have good subject knowledge and, mostly in the business subjects, an industrial background. They use a variety of teaching methods, focusing on practical activities such as designing leaflets about local tourism facilities and encouraging students to visit local organisations and write reports about their visits. Teachers support students closely, for the most part, and assess them carefully using criteria laid down by the examining board, grading work accurately.

95. The sixth form curriculum is largely vocational in nature and includes provision for developing key skills in communication, number and information technology, currently for GNVQ students. This will be extended to all students in September. The curriculum does however, provide an opportunity for an increasing number of students to progress from relatively low levels of achievement at GCSE through intermediate and advanced level GNVQ to employment and, for an increasing minority of students, higher education. Assessment procedures in the sixth form are sound and most GNVQ staff have gained the appropriate national assessor qualifications. GNVQ students receive prompt and effective feedback on their completed assignments, and are aware of ways they can improve.
96. Sixth form courses are largely staffed by experienced and committed teachers. Staff believe that an informal atmosphere in tutor group time will help students develop a sense of responsibility, but tutor time and private study periods are not well used by students. Sixth form library facilities are underdeveloped.
97. The sixth form co-ordinator is working well to manage administrative aspects of GNVQ as well as overseeing students' pastoral guidance in a supportive manner. Development plans for the future are thorough and realistic and provide an opportunity for the school to review the way the sixth form curriculum is planned and managed, in the light of forthcoming national curriculum changes.
98. Overall, the sixth form currently has few pupils and consequently provides poor value for money but numbers are rising and courses are becoming better established.

Special educational needs assessment

99. Procedures for the identification and assessment of students with special educational needs are very effective and meet fully the requirements of the Code of Practice. A range of data is quickly gathered including, where practicable, information from students' previous schools. Procedures for identifying those students with initial causes for concern, stage 1 on the Code of Practice, are well established. The school mentoring system is very helpful in this respect. The special educational needs co-ordinator effectively mentors all students with statements of special educational needs.
100. A range of tests including reading tests and cognitive ability tests in Key Stage 3 enables the learning support department to identify strengths and weaknesses for those with learning needs. This information is made available to all teachers. Students with statements of special educational needs are well cared for and supported where possible by learning support assistants in lessons and by specialist tutors in a small number of lessons when they are withdrawn for individual support. The nominated governor for special educational needs also works as a support tutor. This experience enables her to be in close contact with the work of the department.
101. When statements of special educational need are reviewed annually, the review draws upon a wide range of professional opinion and consultation with parents or carers and the student. This information is used effectively to update students' records. Individual education plans are regularly reviewed. The administration of these procedures and record keeping is well managed by the special educational needs co-ordinator.
102. The records of students with statements of special educational needs and other students on the Code of Practice stages are very well organised, well managed and up to date. The school's register of special educational needs is efficiently and effectively organised and updated regularly.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	155
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	59

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	15	43	35	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 students

Students on the school's roll	No of students
Number of students on the school's roll	772
Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals	111

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y13
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	27
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	304

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	23

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	116
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	51

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	9.2
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.7
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	63	71	134

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	43	34	27
	Girls	60	38	28
	Total	103	72	55
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	78	54	42
	National	63	62	55
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	26	20	7
	National	28	38	23

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	30	39	25
	Girls	55	46	34
	Total	85	85	59
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	65	63	45
	National	64	64	60
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	18	19	14
	National	31	37	28

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	61	89	150

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	7	51	58
	Girls	34	81	85
	Total	41	132	143
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	29	88	95
	National	46.3	90.7	95.7

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	27
	National	37.8

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

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	3
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	5
Indian	3
Pakistani	3
Bangladeshi	6
Chinese	1
White	739
Any other minority ethnic group	10

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	69	6
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	40.9
Number of students per qualified teacher	18.8

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	10
Total aggregate hours worked per week	233

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.2
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	18.8
Key Stage 4	18.8

Financial information

Financial year	Sept 98 – April 99
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	£
Total income	970258
Total expenditure	864761
Expenditure per student	1225
Balance brought forward from previous year	N/a
Balance carried forward to next year	105497

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	772
Number of questionnaires returned	81

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	40	52	8	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	50	46	2	2	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	33	58	6	2	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	25	60	12	4	0
The teaching is good.	38	60	0	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	50	48	0	0	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	60	37	0	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	62	38	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	48	46	4	0	2
The school is well led and managed.	52	44	0	2	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	48	46	5	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	38	48	10	0	4

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

ENGLISH

103. Standards of attainment on entry are below the national average. Girls are below national averages for performance at the end of Key Stage 2. A lower proportion than nationally reach level 4 and above and a much lower proportion gain level 5, as would be expected for a secondary modern intake. Boys significantly underachieve at the end of Key Stage 2 in English compared with girls entering the school and compared with national figures.
104. In Key Stage 3 tests in 1999, 76.1 per cent of students reached level 5 or above, which is above the average nationally and well above the average for similar schools. The proportion of students who attain the higher grade, level 6, is 25.4 per cent. This is in line with the average for all schools and again well above the average for similar schools. Students have made very good progress through Key Stage 3 and make good progress in Key Stage 4, sustaining this level of attainment. By the end of Key Stage 4 in 1999, 56.3 per cent achieved A* - C in English, which indicates results close to the average compared with schools nationally. In literature, which was taken by girls, 66.5 per cent achieved A* - C. This represents performance close to the average nationally for girls and, in the case of both English and English literature, performance overall is well above the national average for secondary modern schools. These were the first test and examination results for this school. There were no 'A' level candidates.
105. The present cohorts at the end of both key stages are less able than those in 1999, having a higher proportion of students with special educational needs. Nevertheless, all students are making good progress in English and the finding of the inspection is that standards at the end of both key stages are close to the national average. There are no students this year studying English at 'A' level in Year 13.
106. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards in speaking and listening are satisfactory overall, although speaking skills are less well developed than listening skills. Most students listen well and have the confidence to take part in oral work and presentations. Students show sound discussion skills and in a Year 9 lesson on *Romeo and Juliet* this allowed good exploration of theme, motive and character. There is a significant minority of students, however, more often boys than girls, in every class, who find it difficult to sustain answers when speaking and they respond in phrases or short sentences. Relatively few are confident and articulate users of standard English.
107. At the end of Key Stage 4, standards of speaking and listening are good for high attaining students. This was apparent in a Year 11 discussion on war reporting. The quality of their talk helped them to attain high standards in other aspects of their work, helping them to a fuller understanding of the issues involved. A particularly strong feature was the ability of students to use the correct technical language to describe the textual features they were studying. It gave a greater precision to their debate when they could accurately and confidently refer to types of headline and aspects of tabloid and broadsheet journalism. Overall, standards of speaking and listening are just satisfactory and again the listening skills are better developed than the speaking skills. However, the emphasis within the department on encouraging students to discuss and debate at every opportunity, so that they are learning for themselves, means that students are skilled at making the best use of a sometimes limited spoken vocabulary to develop and explore their ideas. For example, a low-set class discussing the work of Vera Brittain gained a greater understanding of the effectiveness and themes of her work through whole class and small group discussions. In some cases, they were better able to demonstrate the depth of their understanding orally than they could when they tried to write in response to the teacher's questions.
108. Standards observed both in the classrooms and in the students' work indicate that writing skills are close to average at the end of Key Stage 3 and average at the end of Key Stage 4. Students at Key Stage 3 write expressively for a range of audiences. They can adapt their style to one that is appropriate for formal tasks, such as some kinds of letter writing, reporting or recording. They are fluent at writing stories or personal writing expressing feelings or emotions. It is in the technical aspects of writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation, that there are areas of weakness and standards are below average. Lower attaining students use

techniques from the literacy strategy well to help them to structure their writing, including writing frames, and story boarding. All students redraft their work and frequently refer to dictionaries.

109. At the end of Key Stage 4, attainment in writing is average overall. Higher attaining students write with confidence and fluently. Examples of redrafted coursework show that students are able to use the drafting process to improve the structure and content of their work. Higher attaining students produce folders containing a broad range of work of consistently high quality; especially on the media studies assignments. A Year 10 girl produced an excellent analysis of the way different newspapers dealt with Glen Hoddle's resignation: *colloquial expressions are used .. views mainly of the journalist.. they use eight different fonts, whereas The Times uses three fonts, all small....and quotes other peoples' views, not just their own..* There is some high quality critical and creative writing. One student wrote a poem about a soldier: *He trudges through the mud and grime, Of hateful years, of war and crime.* Some lower attaining students manage to produce imaginative work appropriate for the task, which clearly indicates an understanding of audience. Unfortunately, this work contains evidence that there are still difficulties with spelling, punctuation and grammar.
110. Standards for reading are in line with national standards at the end of both key stages. At Key Stage 3, most students generally read fluently, explore vocabulary and refer to textual evidence to support a viewpoint. Year 7 higher attaining students read poetry well and with understanding, as in a lesson on T S Eliot's cat poetry. Even lower attaining students in Year 9 can read extracts from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* with understanding, after exploring some issues in well-led discussions with their teacher.
111. By Key Stage 4, students read well and widely in a variety of formats. They are able, for example, to read and then discuss the features of tabloid and broadsheet newspapers, showing a good understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of both, and then use their reading well to write news stories in styles appropriate to each format. They acquire a good command of the technical vocabulary of journalism, including layout, banner headlines, font and serif.
112. Progress is good for all students, including the high attainers, students with special educational needs and those from ethnic minority groups, in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. They make rapid progress in the acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding. This is partly because teachers explain learning objectives clearly and share the assessment criteria with the students. The tasks are appropriate for the students' levels of ability; challenging and well focused. Boys make good progress because the department has given great thought as to how to make English relevant and interesting to them. As a result, there is a good mix of fiction and non-fiction texts to study, good use of video clips and opportunities to word process their work, all of which involves and interests the boys in the classes. Students with special educational needs are supported effectively in their setted classes. This ensures that there is an adequate ratio of adults to students to help them to make progress with their work. In a Year 7 bottom set, for example, there are three adults for twenty students. The planning of work assists students to attain the learning objectives set by the teacher. This is a particular strength of the department. There is a clear and consistent pattern to lessons. All start with the learning objectives being explained to the class and these are usually written on the board and left there for the lesson to remind students of what they are expected to attain. The tasks for the lesson are explained and discussed with the class, followed by a series of activities, some individual, some in small groups and some whole-class, that are designed to take them forward in their knowledge and skills in clear steps. At the end of the lesson, good plenary sessions reinforce the learning advances made. Very good examples of this were observed in a Year 7 lesson, in which students were writing poems about a popcorn machine, and in a Year 12 lesson on the main characters in *Much Ado About Nothing*. In almost all lessons, students work at a brisk pace, because teachers insist on attention and keep them on-task. Students understand and evaluate their own learning well and this helps them to improve and make progress.
113. Students' attitudes are good at both key stages. When offered opportunities to take responsibilities, such as providing feedback from a discussion group or leading a drama improvisation, students always respond in a mature and positive manner. Most students are co-operative with each other and teachers. Where the teacher's control is strong and relationships with students good, relaxed relationships are combined with a purposeful approach. In these lessons, students are able to sustain concentration when working and behaviour in the classroom is very good. Where teachers are less confident in their ability to

control students, or let slip classroom disciplines of putting up hands and being considerate to others, the pace of the lessons can be slow as teachers ask for quiet or students have difficulty concentrating. Most students display a capacity to work independently, moving from one activity to another with the minimum of fuss.

114. Students show an enjoyment of the subject and appreciate the work their teachers do to make the courses interesting for them. Work is well presented and attractive, demonstrating a positive commitment to learning. This is apparent in their folders and on the wall displays.
115. The quality of teaching is good in both key stages and in the sixth form. In Key Stage 3, just over 12 per cent of teaching is very good, 40 per cent is satisfactory and the rest is good. At Key Stage 4, almost half the teaching is very good, a quarter satisfactory and just over a quarter good. In the sixth form just over half the teaching is good and the rest is satisfactory. There is no unsatisfactory teaching at any key stage. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge. Expectations of students are high, particularly in low attaining groups. Planning is excellent throughout, with lesson objectives and assessment criteria clearly identified and shared with the students. Homework is set regularly and students' work is generally marked carefully with helpful targets set, linked to the improvement of content and structure. Assessment is used well, both in the planning to ensure that work builds on previous learning and in the lessons, when teachers good give good advice and help to individuals and groups. The ability to manage and control students, although satisfactory overall, varies from satisfactory to very good.
116. The department is led very well by an enthusiastic and gifted teacher. She gives clear guidance and good support to the other teachers in the department. The planning is excellent and the department's schemes and strategies are very evident in the work of all the team. As a result, there is considerable evidence that standards improve in English from a weak starting point on entry and analysis of examination results shows that students perform very well in English compared with other subjects. There is relatively little use of information and communication technology in the department. However, this is a very successful department, which is doing much to promote the aims of the school.

Literacy

117. A clear policy statement outlines the purpose of the literacy strategy. It is understood by subject tutors who reinforce literacy in their lessons. In all subjects, teachers are assiduously checking that students know and understand the specialised vocabulary they will need to understand and succeed in lessons. In science, for example, a low set of Year 9 students studying forces were given a list of words to learn, including gravity and atmospheric pressure. In English, every lesson begins with five minutes of spelling practice and the continual reinforcement of spelling patterns is having positive results. In a Year 7 lesson on *Macavity*, for example, the students had to learn and understand words such as 'to rifle' and 'feline' before the poem was read. As a result, they understood these words in their context and understood the whole poem better because they were well prepared.
118. Students in both key stages are helped by their teachers, when necessary, to read and comprehend, and to extract information and use referencing skills. The new investment in information and communication technology resources is enabling students to use, write and read information, using computers, including CD ROMs. In general, students are aware of audience and appropriateness of style in their writing. Many students have poor standards of accuracy and presentation. There is evidence of redrafting and manipulating of text in English, history and information technology.
119. Specialist vocabulary is identified and explained in art, design technology, science and history. Key technical words and criteria for good presentation are displayed in many subject classrooms.

120. Levels of literacy, especially amongst boys, are still an area of concern. The school has identified the problem and has taken significant steps to address it. Boys make good progress in all aspects of English and standards overall at the end of Key Stage 4 are close to average. Nevertheless, earlier in the school, literacy problems can affect their progress in academic subjects. Although not strictly literacy, there is a lack of confidence in oral work across the curriculum. Some students find it difficult to listen attentively and enable others to make contributions to group and class discussions. Many students, especially boys, lack confidence when speaking in 'formal' situations. They are not very articulate or fluent and do not use standard English readily.

MATHEMATICS

121. Overall standards are below average. In 1999 the attainment of the Year 7 entrants was slightly higher than that of the previous year while remaining below the national average. The 1999 National Curriculum assessments at the end of Year 9 were in line with those of secondary modern schools with the girls being slightly ahead of the boys. They were below the national average for maintained schools. In the 1999 GCSE examination, the proportion gaining grades A* to G was above the national average particularly for the girls. The proportion of awards in the higher grades A* to C were well below the national averages for maintained schools and for secondary modern schools. One unhelpful factor here was the unsatisfactory overall quality of the coursework submitted for GCSE as this cohort changed schools in the middle of Key Stage 4. The school suffered from staffing difficulties that necessitated the deployment of temporary teachers. Some of these staffing difficulties continued during the Autumn term of 1999 but had been resolved at the time of the inspection. In the Sixth Form a small number of students retake GCSE; in 1999 only a small proportion gained grades A* to C at their second attempt.
122. The attainment of the majority of students is below average with little difference across Key Stages 3 and 4. The attainment of the sixth form students retaking GCSE is in line with that expected for this course. While most students are achieving satisfactorily in terms of their previous attainment, the current achievements of Year 11 students is unsatisfactory as the motivation of a minority of these students is poor, despite the best efforts on the part of the teachers. Overall, however, the current Year 11 students are on track to gain significantly higher GCSE results than those of 1999. By the end of Key Stage 3, all students can classify polygons and find the volumes of simple solid shapes while the abler students are using decimals and are able to approximate by rounding. By the end of Key Stage 4, most students can solve problems involving the angle properties of polygons and intersecting lines while higher attaining students use trigonometry to solve problems. Students' skills of investigation are mainly satisfactory.
123. Most students lack security with written calculations and mental arithmetic. The school is aware of this and, while it is not yet promoting numeracy in all subjects, mathematics teachers are devoting part of every lesson to the strengthening of basic skills and fostering students' familiarity with the vocabulary of mathematics. Such work, while usually handled well, still leaves scope for more systematic reinforcement of basic knowledge and skills to help students to remember work they have covered previously. There is productive use of the skills of mathematics in food technology and in information and technology lessons. Good use is made of charts and graphs in geography at Key Stage 4, but less effectively in the younger classes. Most subjects draw upon mathematics to some extent but in science and design technology for example, such application is not consistent.
124. In over one-third of lessons observed, students' learning was good or very good, and in an additional 50 per cent, their learning was satisfactory. There is little difference across the age ranges. Their progress over time is less favourable than that in lessons because so many have poor retention of their past learning. Students in Year 7 were making good progress in a lesson where the teacher used an overhead projector effectively to help them understand how solid shapes can be represented on isometric paper. In a few lessons at Key Stage 4, learning was unsatisfactory. For example, in a Year 11 lesson, some of the boys did not have sufficient self-discipline to apply themselves consistently to work despite the proximity of the GCSE examination. The students with special learning needs make generally satisfactory progress because their individual learning requirements are clearly identified. Most teachers, in their use of language and clarity of explanations, take due account of the learning needs in the class.

125. Most students are strongly motivated. This is reflected in the care taken in their written work. In four out of every five lessons their response to learning was at least satisfactory and in over half it was good, very good or excellent. This positive picture owes much to the high quality of relationships that exist in most lessons. This was typified in a Year 10 lesson on vector notation where the skilful questioning by the teacher fostered the students' thinking and their grasp of the new work. The response to learning of a minority of boys was unsatisfactory in a few lessons.
126. The teaching was at least satisfactory in almost all the lessons seen and was good, very good or excellent in half; this is an unusually high proportion. Such well-directed teaching, by strongly assisting the students' learning and providing keen sense of progress, bolsters students' motivation and enjoyment of the subject. The most effective teaching reflected good planning that ensured a purposeful approach, clear explanations and sufficient variety to ensure that interest was maintained. These features were clearly evident in a Year 7 lesson on three-dimensional shapes. The stimulating development of the topic together with students' handling of shapes led to the enthusiastic participation of the whole class and they worked out Euler's theorem for themselves. The teaching was unsatisfactory in just one lesson: this was because the teacher's explanations were not sufficiently clear and insufficient efforts were made to check students' inattention. Teachers are marking students' work regularly although the feedback to students is not always as helpful as it should be. Homework is regularly set but in the lower attaining classes, students' response is less consistent. There are enough textbooks to support learning in lessons but insufficient to enable books to be loaned to students. Consequently, even when students are making final preparations in Key Stage 4 for GCSE entry, they lack this encouragement and support for independent study.
127. The leadership of the department is strong. High quality guidance is provided and, appropriately keyed to the National Curriculum, it effectively informs teachers' lesson planning. In particular the programme of work in Year 7 has been well conceived to ensure that students have a stimulating experience in the subject. Much time and effort is devoted to assessing attainment and deriving targets for individual students. The department is now making appropriate use of information technology to support learning in mathematics. Much has been achieved in the relatively short time since the school opened and, provided that the staffing position remains stable, the mathematics department is well placed to raise overall attainment.

SCIENCE

128. The attainment of students in science at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with secondary modern schools nationally but is below the national average. This was so for test results at the end of the key stage in 1999 and is similar in lessons. Girls achieved better than boys in the tests. In lessons, the majority of students achieve according to their abilities, but higher attaining students do not always achieve to their potential. Attainment in scientific investigation is also limited for higher attaining students. The inspection found that by the end of the key stage, the majority of students are able to work with chemical symbols, with pyramids of numbers and are able to distinguish sound frequency and wavelength. However, the higher attaining students are limited in their confidence in dealing with the deeper aspects of these, especially where mathematics is involved.
129. All students who took GCSE examinations in science in 1999 had one year in the school. In the light of this upheaval, there were some creditable results, due to the efforts made by the staff of Valley Park Community School. The number of A* to C grades for single award science was better than the national average, with girls achieving more than the boys. In double award science, A* to C grades were close to those of secondary modern schools nationally, with girls achieving close to the national average for all schools.
130. At present, the indications are that, for those students coming up to GCSE, the number of A* to C grades in double award science will approach the national average for all schools for both boys and girls. In lessons, both boys and girls achieve similarly, the majority according to their potential although higher attaining students do not always achieve to their potential. By the end of the key stage, students are generally able to work with chemical equations in both word and symbol form. The balancing of more complex equations causes difficulty for higher attaining students. Mathematical equations are tackled by all students in word form and most can work with simple equations in symbol form. In scientific investigations, the level of

scientific knowledge used in planning is not sufficiently high for the top marks at GCSE and, although graphs are used frequently, lines of best fit are not common.

131. Too few students at present take sixth form courses in science for any valid comment to be made about overall attainment. However, those whose work and lessons were observed show concentration and application to their work and are achieving well.
132. Students with special educational needs achieve well, thanks to supportive and structured teaching. In an investigation into the effect of light levels on the growing of plants, a Year 8 set of lower attaining students were given a very clear demonstration to set the scene, and a written structure for their writing which focused their thoughts and supported their written work.
133. At all key stages, students generally co-operate with each other and their teachers and put effort into their studies. This leads to satisfactory learning in the great majority of lessons. For example, a Year 7 set working on the acidity of soil were able to work together well on the practical activity with only minimal support from the teacher. Equally, a Year 10 set concentrated hard on an investigation into the stretching of wires, learning about the way science measurements are made more accurately. In some instances, however, students indulge in behaviour which distracts them from their own learning despite efforts made by their teachers. This happens to some degree at all ability levels, in both key stages, and with both boys and girls.
134. All teaching is either satisfactory or better. A great deal of effort has been made by all teachers to successfully create a structured, supportive and controlled atmosphere in lessons. Good teaching shows in flexible support and a good pace to the lesson. For example, a Year 11 class of lower attaining students made good progress in learning about sound when they were taken through a well planned series of activities that allowed each student to take part, but in a controlled way and at a level carefully matched to their abilities. Literacy for all students is tackled well and there is some good datalogging developing in the department.
135. Where teaching has weaker points it is in an over reliance on published texts and limited range of teaching and learning styles. The higher levels of scientific investigation are weak as is the teaching of the mathematical side of science. These points come together to restrict the learning of higher attaining students. For example, a highly structured lesson on sound for higher attaining students for Year 8 kept them from learning from each other or exploring deeper scientific theory. Again, a group of higher attaining students in Year 11 watched some useful demonstrations on measuring the speed of sound but the level of mathematics and scientific knowledge was kept below that needed for them to progress properly.
136. A tremendous amount of dedicated, hard work by all the science teachers and the science technician has gone into creating a smoothly operating department. This has been achieved in a very short space of time and the head of department has given a strong lead. Development is a constant feature of the department but this is currently being restricted by several factors. The head of science has lead all aspects of the department since its inception but now needs other staff to take responsibility for developing particular issues or parts of the department. Its ICT provision, though well used, is restricted and very out-of-date. Textbooks are not available for students to take home on any regular basis.

ART

137. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with that expected nationally. There is some very good ceramic work in Year 8, for example an imaginative project on the theme of metamorphosis that resulted in half animal, half human busts which showed skilful use of glazes. There is also some interesting work in pen and ink on 'fantasy townscapes'. Some of the work at Key Stage 3 is however unimaginative and there is a lack of diversity.
138. The GCSE A* to C examination results for 1999 of 32.4 per cent were below those for secondary modern schools and well below the national expectation for all maintained schools. However, work seen in class is generally in keeping with that expected for secondary modern schools, and with no significant difference between boys' and girls' performance in art. The difference in standards is because last year, pupils came from two schools part way through their courses.

139. At post 16, there is effective use of photography as an art form in itself and as a research tool. There is good use of critical and contextual studies to inform the development of students' work, for example, one GNVQ student used Joseph Wright of Derby's dramatic composition and lighting effects to feed into some good painting. Very good progress is made in painting between Years 12 and 13.
140. Teachers in general have good subject knowledge and enthusiasm for their subject which motivates students, especially at Key Stage 4 and at post 16. There is however, some over-prescriptive teaching, particularly at Key Stage 3, which results in some dull work and which does not stretch the most able. There are some lost opportunities for introducing students to a broader range of art forms and other cultures; at Key Stage 3, this is exacerbated by a lack of visits to museums and galleries and virtually no use of information and communication technology. Self evaluation forms, completed by students, are used to good effect at Key Stage 3, to monitor and guide progress, but this is not consistent throughout the department.
141. Students learn effectively in certain areas, such as ceramics, due in the main to teachers' subject knowledge and appropriate use of language; care is taken to ensure that students use terms correctly and understand the concepts behind them. Students with special educational needs are generally well catered for in terms of individual attention, but there is a need for more careful matching of work to different levels of attainment throughout Key Stage 3, particularly in textiles. Where students achieve less well, it is occasionally through uninspired teaching and a lack of first hand experience of other artists' and designers' work.
142. Most students behave well in class and there are high expectations; there are very good attitudes to learning at post 16, where students are actively encouraged to undertake independent research; sketchbooks are well used.
143. The department is well managed, of particular value is the support given to new members of staff. It is adequately resourced, but there is a need for more technical support in ceramics, and students at Key Stage 3 do not have enough access to information and communication technology facilities.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

144. At Key Stage 4, the GCSE design and technology: food, graphics, resistant materials and textiles A* to C grades for 1999 were well below the national average. When compared to the results of similar schools, only those for food matched, leaving graphics, resistant materials and textiles all below average. The A* to G grades in all of these GCSE design and technology subjects were broadly in line with national averages and the results of similar schools. In design and technology: graphics, the girls outperformed the boys in their attainment of A* to C grades. Although the girls attained below national average, their graphics results were only just below the average when compared to that of similar schools.
145. At the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is broadly in line with what is expected of fourteen year olds. The assessment by teachers at the end of Key Stage 3 indicates that students attain above national averages. At the end of Key Stage 3, students are able to follow the design process in all the aspects of design and technology. They show limited ability to analyse and draw conclusions using existing products due to the lack of opportunities provided in lessons to do this. In a resistant materials lesson for example, students were asked to design a key ring.

They found difficulty in writing a design specification without looking at some examples. However, there are some opportunities in food technology where students are asked to analyse products. In graphic products they are taught a range of two and three-dimensional drawing skills and some students are beginning to apply these skills in other areas of technology but not consistently.

146. Students are able to generate a range of ideas, develop, make and evaluate their work. They are encouraged to plan their ideas in detail, using drawings and notes to explain each stage of development. In food technology, students are able to develop and plan their work using structured worksheets and time plans. They generate and use numerical data in the form of charts, graphs and food calculations. There are however some missed opportunities to encourage students to be accurate when drawing in graphics. Most students produce drawings of different sizes despite the measurements given on the board. They are not at this stage corrected by the teacher.
147. Students with lower ability and those with low levels of literacy, are insufficiently challenged by the limited range of learning resources and teaching strategies used. A number of students resorted to poor levels of behaviour when a textiles lesson was less structured and students were less well supported. In a more structured lesson, the same class achieved better the following day. Another example was when less structure to a resistant materials' lesson left students unsure of how to write their own design brief. Analysis of other similar products could have given them a better starting point. A small percentage of more able girls, work diligently during lessons but are less challenged by the level of work being covered. They work at a very slow pace and learning is affected further by some of the boys who are not fully engaged in their work.
148. Teaching in the main is satisfactory although a high proportion of lessons in resistant materials and textiles was found to be unsatisfactory. Teachers are well planned and organised for lessons. Schemes of work however, have few detailed plans for students with special educational needs. Students of all abilities benefit from lessons that are structured and that provide resources for suitable for their needs. A good example in food enabled students to use a proforma for planning. This gave them a suitable structure for writing within which they could apply their own ideas. Individual support by the adults in a very busy classroom environment provides a pace appropriate for all students. Marking is inconsistent across the department, much of the marking does not suggest to students how they might improve their work.
149. A system is in place to monitor teaching and this is beginning to have a positive effect on the methods that all staff use. Food and textiles benefit from a high standard of accommodation and resources as they are sited in a new building. This has a positive impact on maintaining high standards of hygiene and safety. Although there has been some improvement in re-organising aspects of the resistant materials and graphic product areas, the accommodation would benefit from further decoration and development of resources to offer more enhanced multi-media, graphic design and control technology facilities.
150. The curriculum in design and technology is well planned and there is a fair balance of experience for students in all material areas. There is insufficient coverage however of electronics and control technology which are not yet developed in design and technology.
151. In the main, students at Key Stage 4 make satisfactory progress with their GCSE examination course work and teachers have strategies in place to raise the level of attainment in 2000. Students produce projects which show that they understand the process of design.

DRAMA

152. Drama is taught to all students in Key Stage 3 and to examination classes which have opted for the subject at Key Stage 4. Standards in GCSE were below the average nationally in 1999, when the subject was taken only by boys, a legacy of the two separate schools. Fifty per cent of candidates attained A* to C grades.
153. The findings of the inspection are that standards at the end of Key Stage 4 for the present cohort are average compared with the country as a whole. Students demonstrate good improvisation skills and can evaluate their work and that of others. Their written work is varied and broad in range. They demonstrate that they are developing the knowledge and skills to

make sensible and informed points about drama productions they have seen. They learn to work as part of a team and to accept individual and collective responsibility.

154. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 ranges widely, because the classes are set by ability. The top sets show many of the skills demonstrated by the GCSE sets in Key Stage 4 and are working to a good standard. Lower sets sometimes make slow progress and find it difficult to co-operate with others in small group work. All achieve well in relation to their prior abilities, however.
155. In almost all lessons, students' attitudes are good and they respond well to the teacher. They are anxious to do well and keen to share their work through performance. They co-operate effectively, working well both in small groups and as a whole class. Their behaviour is good and they make good progress as a result, listening and learning from the teacher and each other. In a small minority of lessons, generally with lower sets dominated by boys with identified special educational needs, behaviour and attitudes are unsatisfactory and it is the hard work of the teachers and their insistence on high standards that leads to progress eventually being made in these lessons.
156. Teaching is good overall, good in half the lessons, very good in a quarter and satisfactory in the remainder. The department is led by a well-qualified and enthusiastic teacher, who has used her experience well to provide a relevant and varied scheme of work for both key stages. Teaching is characterised by good subject knowledge and effective, clear lesson planning. The aims of the lesson are shared with students at the beginning of every lesson and there is always effective and useful evaluation at the end, involving the students in self evaluation or peer evaluation wherever possible. An atmosphere of trust is established in almost all classes, so that students are prepared to take risks and to share their feelings.
157. The curriculum for drama is broad and wide ranging, providing a good and appropriate balance of opportunities for scripted and unscripted drama; for the teaching of performance skills and the exploration of feelings and social issues through the medium of improvisation. There are limited opportunities for the development of technical skills, such as theatre lighting and make-up, but these are in the departmental development plan. Students are taught the vocabulary as well as the mechanics of drama, and are familiar with terms such as *improvisation*, *hot – seating*, *role-play* and *freeze frames*. The accommodation for drama is good. The drama studio is spacious and includes sound and lighting facilities. Resources are satisfactory, and include video facilities so that performances can be recorded and then played back for discussion and evaluation. Drama makes a significant contribution to the social, spiritual, moral and cultural development of the students. It allows them to explore issues such as poverty, homelessness, friendship and bullying, as well as helping them to a better understanding of drama of consequence and worth, such as *Romeo and Juliet*

GEOGRAPHY

158. In 1999, when students had only been one year at the school the A* to C grades results at GCSE were considerably below the national average for maintained secondary schools but above those for secondary modern schools. The A* to G results were, however, above the national average for both these types of school. Girls performed better than boys in line with the national position but boys obtained the higher grades. Students performed just above the average in geography when results are compared with those in the other subjects they study. Most students obtained merit or distinction grades in the Certificate of Achievement.
159. Generally students attain levels, which are below the nationally expected level by the end of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 but standards are noticeably improving. By the end of Key Stage 3, students have a sound grounding in geographical skills and vocabulary. Most can use and interpret simple maps, have a satisfactory understanding of spatial and environmental issues and a good knowledge of levels of world development. They also have a sound knowledge of place but are weak in the plotting and presentation of statistical data. By the end of Key Stage 4, most students can explain the main physical and human processes studied and can apply geographical skills well to their course work. In the sixth form, students organise their work satisfactorily and are developing a sound grasp of geographical concepts. Students with special needs generally work well, particularly when provided with learning support assistance when they produce work at least as well as that expected for their prior attainment and often considerably better. When this support is not available, standards of work produced

suffer. Useful knowledge and understanding is gained of social and cultural issues through studies of Kenya, the Solomon Islands, and Japan.

160. Students' attitudes to learning are generally positive and constructive at all key stages and many students display a real interest and enjoyment in their work. However, occasionally in the lowest sets, as in Year 9, a small number of students who have not yet taken on board the new culture of good behaviour, display negative attitudes which result in wasted time and a low work rate for the whole class. Students' behaviour is normally good and often very good. Students develop good relationships with their teachers, and there is real rapport evident in many classes. Students relate very well to each other when working in groups, as for example, the excellent support given quietly and helpfully by students with competence in information technology to their peers when needed. Individuals' response to questions is sound but few students contribute to discussion and their oral skills are unsatisfactory and do not support learning. Students on the whole respond well to teaching and over time, they develop maturity and good personal development, although there are sometimes insufficient opportunities for independent learning.
161. The standard of teaching observed was satisfactory or better in all key stages with some very effective teaching at Key Stage 3. Eight out of ten lessons were good or better. This has a major impact on learning and progress. Teachers are very committed and supportive, relate positively to students and generally manage them well. The best teaching had clear aims shared with students and tested at the end of lessons, detailed and imaginative planning, dynamic and stimulating presentation delivered in a structured focused way, with good pace and challenge and using a range of teaching methods targeted towards the needs within classes. In these lessons staff have a very secure knowledge of the subject matter taught and presentation encourages genuine enjoyment in the subject. The expectations that teachers have of their students' work are high and results in most students producing good standards of work. Generally, however, teaching would benefit from students having more opportunity for their own enquiry, more class inter-active discussion, and more re-enforcing and consolidating of the main aims of the lesson, for example by writing students' contributions visually on the board. Fieldwork undertaken greatly enriches studying but much more is needed at all key stages, including in Key Stage 3 where students need the experience at first hand of an environment outside the local area. A very good start has been made in developing information technology but there is now need for a coherent IT skills programme linked directly to curricular themes across the key stages. The teaching in geography allows students to develop literacy and numeracy skills progressively throughout all key stages to a satisfactory standard.
162. The high quality structured and focused teaching with target setting in Year 11 and the mentoring support system in Key Stage 3 and 4 all contribute positively to the generally good learning that occurs. Students' constructive attitudes to work also aid learning and most students make good progress at both key stages. Overall, satisfactory progress is made in the sixth form but the attitudes of a few students in some lessons are unhelpful. When a range of visual aids and topical and local examples are used in the teaching, lesson aims are easier to understand as they are within the students' experience and this impacts significantly on the quality of learning. Some students have difficulties with recalling work recently completed. Students' performance is always carefully assessed and teacher's comments are very valuable in helping them to improve standards. As yet, however, students are not involved in evaluating their own work and setting targets to sustain progress.
163. The department is very ably led and efficiently organised and managed by an active and enthusiastic head of department who keeps abreast of curriculum developments in the subject. Leadership ensures clear direction for the development of the subject and makes a strong contribution to the very noticeable improving standards of the department. Priorities in the first year have been appropriate and there has been some monitoring of teaching and learning but this now needs to be extended to include a full evaluation of the work of the department. Wall displays provide an excellent learning environment for students. Shortages in resources, which reduce learning opportunities, include a textbook and pamphlets for sixth form students, a suite of computers linked to the Internet, a computerised weather station and a fieldwork budget. This is a good department, with a strong team spirit prevailing and has very good potential for further development.

HISTORY

164. Attainment in history at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, based on assessments made by teachers, was in line with what is achieved nationally by 14 year olds. The percentage of students achieving the higher grades was below the national average for students of this age. The attainment of boys was, in general, well below that of girls, although slightly more boys than girls attained the highest level, Attainment based on evidence seen during the course of the inspection was close to what is found nationally.
165. Students have knowledge and understanding of an appropriate range of historical facts, situations and characters and most students are developing a range of key historical skills. They understand that historical situations do not happen at random, as they have both causes and effects. They understand that while many features of life during periods other than our own are very different and frequently surprising, many features are also constant throughout history. Students know that we find out about history through a variety of source material and that this must be used with care in order to interpret it correctly. Many students find it difficult to communicate this knowledge and understanding in writing and their written work fails to do justice to their ideas. When writing, many restrict themselves to basic statements of fact or opinion and while they support these with historical evidence, they do not use the full range of supporting evidence that they use in their oral work.
166. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 in 1999 was sharply divided between boys and girls, with the percentage of girls attaining grades A* to C grades close to the national average and well above what is found in secondary modern schools. The boys, who as a result of the amalgamation of two schools, had followed a different syllabus and had been taught separately from the girls throughout their course, achieved well below what is found both nationally and in secondary modern schools. Of the students who will be taking their examination in 2000, the percentage who are on course to achieve grade A* to C is close to the national average for 1999. Attainment based on evidence seen during the course of the inspection is also close to what is found nationally.
167. Most students have an appropriate range of historical knowledge and skills and increasingly use dates to clarify chronology. All understand that it is important to use written evidence in order to justify their opinions, although many students fail to do this fully. Some students do not use sufficient detail in their written work, although their contributions to work in class makes it clear that they have more detailed knowledge than is apparent from their written accounts. Most students have, with guidance from their teachers, been able to carry out research for their local study, a topic on which there is little published evidence, and they use this research well in planning and illustrating their written reports.
168. Students at both key stages make good progress in developing historical knowledge and skills, and although many find the use of detail in written work difficult, progress in this is evident over a period of time. This progress is particularly evident in the skills of evaluating the reliability of source material and in the acquisition of a specialised historical vocabulary, which, for many students, outstrips their basic vocabulary. Good progress is made by students with special needs and those for whom English is an additional language, the latter in particular showing growing confidence in their use of language. Students work hard and show good levels of concentration which has a very positive impact on their learning. Lessons which are planned and resourced in detail to meet the needs of students have a very positive impact on progress, although some lower attaining students remain very dependent on the support of their teachers to complete written assignments and show very limited initiative for finding things out for themselves. Students understand their own progress, take a keen interest in interpreting teachers' comments and know what they need to do to improve their work.
169. Behaviour in lessons is good and students derive great benefit from the good relationships that exist among themselves and with their teachers. Students in general show interest in their work and are eager to do well. They are very courteous and supportive to each other, work productively in groups and pairs and evaluate each others' work very sensitively.
170. All teaching seen was at least good, with more than a third very good. One lesson was excellent. There are many significant strengths in teaching which have a very positive impact on both students' attitudes and the quality of their learning. All lessons seen were well planned in considerable detail, with clear objectives for learning. Resources are very thoughtfully planned to make lessons accessible to students and tasks and activities are planned to meet the needs of students at varying levels of attainment. For example, students studying the

complex causes of the First World War carry out a wide variety of tasks, designed to meet needs at a variety of attainment levels and these are supported by a good range of learning resources. Very good use is made of the assessment of students' attainment and progress in order to clarify what they need to do to improve and care is taken to ensure that students are fully involved in this process and understand their own progress. This understanding of what they need to do to improve has a positive impact on students' learning. Teachers have a thorough understanding of the nature of the problems in literacy experienced by some students, especially boys, and the range of methods that can be employed to support reading and writing skills. These methods are consistently applied and those experiencing such difficulties are well supported.

171. The subject is very well managed with a clear commitment to raising standards. Department documentation is comprehensive and very helpful and all policies are carried out extensively and consistently. Great thought has been put into making the curriculum interesting and relevant, especially in Key Stage 4, where effective measures have been taken to give the subject a clear practical element and to making it an attractive option for those selecting their GCSE subjects. There is good, planned use made of information technology and this has a positive impact on students' progress and self confidence.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

172. At Key Stage 4 in 1999, girls attained A* to C grades in GCSE information studies well above both the national average and the average for secondary modern schools. Their A* to G grades were slightly above the national average and that of similar schools. The boys attained A* to C grades in GCSE information technology well below both the national average and the average for secondary modern schools. Their A* to G grades were only slightly below both national average and similar schools. An overall judgement on attainment cannot be made as pupils from the previous schools were following different courses. There are significant differences in the attainment of girls and boys with girls outperforming the boys. The school is aware of this and has set realistic targets to improve examination success.
173. At Key Stage 3, attainment in information and communications technology (ICT) is in line with national expectations in all work seen and lessons observed. The assessment by teachers at the end of Key Stage 3 indicated that attainment was slightly above the national average. By the end of the key stage, students cover a good variety of basic skills in ICT and are taught to use a range of software packages. In Year 7, students use desktop publishing (DTP), learn to use spreadsheets and cover aspects of control using a program called 'Logo'. In Year 8 students increase their knowledge of spreadsheets and search for information using both CDROM and the internet. In Year 9, students develop their skills of computer control further and are able to create their own web page. However, students' analytical skills and their opportunities to apply their knowledge to a range of situations and to select their own choice of software, are unsatisfactory.
174. Students at Key Stage 4 continue the development of their ICT skills towards a full GCSE course or to attain key skills level 2 towards GNVQ or NEAB Certificate of Achievement. Students are encouraged to build on the range of skills they acquire during Key Stage 3. For example in Year 11, GNVQ students are able to use DTP to produce spider diagrams and to use CDROM to investigate vocational information. The majority of students work well and make satisfactory progress where lessons are well structured and the goals are clear. A small number of boys with poor skills in literacy, do not benefit fully from lessons due to the limited range of learning resources that is used. As a result they find difficulty in concentrating for long periods and are less challenged by the slower pace. A number of higher attaining girls are passive in lessons and as a result are underachieving.
175. In the sixth form, IT is best used in business studies. GNVQ students at Key Stage 4 who take GNVQ Part 1, use ICT well in both leisure and tourism and health and social care courses to present their work using DTP but there is insufficient use of spreadsheets and databases to produce tables, graphs and charts.
176. There is a clear strategy to develop ICT skills both in discrete lessons and across other subjects. Good examples of using ICT are in science where students use data logging skills, variables, movement, applications and effects, CDROM, word processing and in the science

club. In mathematics they use spreadsheets and a specialist program for geometry. Students with special educational needs make good progress in mathematics using a program. Although the co-ordination of ICT across the curriculum has started, some areas are still using it insufficiently, especially in religious education, music, modern foreign languages, design and technology, geography and physical education.

177. In the main, students across all key stages respond well to work in lessons and form positive relationships with teachers, their peers and other adults in the department. They are well supported by the schools' mentoring system and well motivated by the system of rewards.
178. Overall, teaching is satisfactory and many lessons have good features. A small number of lessons are unsatisfactory. Teachers show a high level of planning and preparation for lessons. In most lessons there are clear objectives, which support the learning of students as they are clear about what they have to learn. Teachers follow the school's guidance for developing literacy skills; for example, explaining the technical language associated with ICT and encouraging students to use it correctly. Workbooks are produced which are helpful in moving the students learning forward when they undertake projects. Teachers show good knowledge of their subject and in the main use questions and answers effectively to assess how much the students learn and understand.
179. In a few lessons, the needs of students of different attainment are not taken into account. As a result, learning is less effective for those with special educational needs and some students show poor levels of behaviour. In a few lessons this poor behaviour has an adverse effect on the progress of other students who try to work more independently. There is an assessment scheme in place and information is systematically recorded and linked to targets for improvement. However, marking is inconsistent across the department. This often fails to recognise and specify positive achievement and students are unaware of the features of their work that are good and how they can improve.
180. The department is well managed with a good supportive departmental handbook. Policies and schemes of work are well developed and are up to date. Meetings are held regularly and minutes are kept. There is a clear development plan for the subject and this is reviewed and evaluated at regular intervals. Over the past two years the school has benefited well from the ICT budget being directed to create three specialist suites. The next phase being to develop resources across other departments. There is good technician support and the facilities are used well.

MEDIA STUDIES

181. Media studies is taught as an option at Key Stage 4. There is one examination group in each year studying for a GCSE qualification. In 1999, ten students took the examination, all of whom had begun the course in the boys' school. Two of these students attained a pass at A* to C level. Overall, the students who took the course attained better results in it than in their other GCSE subjects.
182. It is now a popular option, with large, mixed classes enjoying a good and varied curriculum. Standards are close to national averages. Students understand the specialist language of film and newspapers. They have a good knowledge of the industry that promotes the careers of pop stars and other media personalities. They have studied advertising and can recognise and use the devices employed to try and persuade consumers to buy particular products.
183. Students' attitudes are good. They discuss and co-operate well in small and large groups. Many show independence and initiative when working on individual assignments on, for example, newspaper reporting or following the news coverage of particular personalities. They are enthusiastic about the subject and obviously want to do well, persevering when work is difficult. All are ready to express opinions, such as when a Year 11 class was discussing the different images and roles portrayed in two contrasting 'Wham' promotional videos from different decades. Their comments are generally perceptive and thoughtful.
184. The quality of teaching is consistently very good. The teacher has good subject knowledge and very good class control and relationships. She gives clear guidance to the students and her lesson planning is of high quality. The use she makes of resources is excellent, choosing them carefully so that they are interesting and relevant to the students, whilst ensuring that

they are used very effectively to help them in their understanding. Homework is often imaginative and encourages independent learning. Her expectations are high, both of work and behaviour, and this leads to a very good learning ethos in the classroom. She uses marking and assessment well to help students move forward in their learning and to set short-term, attainable targets. Overall, media studies is a valuable addition to the curriculum at Key Stage 4, allowing students to follow a course that is relevant and interesting to them and that brings them a greater understanding of the ways in which the media industry seeks to influence their lives and habits. It is a very good preparation for life beyond school.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

185. In the 1999 GCSE examinations in French, the proportion of students gaining grades A* to C was below the national average. However the percentage of the year group entered for the examination was well above that found nationally. In comparison with secondary modern schools, the examination performance matched the national figure although the boys attained well below average levels.
186. By the end of both key stages, students' attainment is below national expectations. They nevertheless achieve levels in line with their prior attainment and they make good progress in their learning. The highest attaining students at the end of Key Stage 3 are able to write an account of their daily routine or a visit using the perfect tense with reasonable accuracy. Most students in Key Stage 3 have satisfactory reading skills and their listening skills are good because of the teachers' sustained use of the language being taught for instructions and simple explanations. Speaking skills are less well developed because there is a reluctance to speak accurately particularly among boys. Teachers are having success in overcoming this, notably in Years 7 and 8 where there is a palpable enthusiasm to take part in oral activities from both boys and girls. In these year groups, students of differing attainment, including those with special educational needs, are developing the confidence to use the language they are learning.
187. The most competent students in Key Stage 4 are able to write at length using the present, past and future tenses. They write formal and informal letters and have a good understanding of grammar. Students at Key Stage 4 generally have reading, writing and listening skills appropriate to their abilities although many, particularly boys, still lack the confidence to speak. Students at both key stages make good progress. Those students who have special educational needs receive strong support and encouragement and also make good progress.
188. Students' attitudes to learning are good. Concentration is usually sustained throughout lessons and students are well motivated, including lower achievers. Despite the best efforts of teachers, many older students have to be persuaded to contribute in oral work although they too are usually keen to show that they understand the vocabulary. Lessons provide a well-ordered learning environment. Students' behaviour is good. In some lower ability groups, however, a small minority of students attempt to disrupt. Instances of unsatisfactory behaviour are dealt with consistently and competently by teachers and they do not allow the learning of the majority of students to be affected.
189. The quality of teaching in modern languages is good and teachers have a secure knowledge of the subject. Their planning is effective and has a strong impact on students' learning. It ensures that there is a variety of activities to motivate students and that all the attainment targets are covered. Teachers have high expectations of their students. They provide challenging reading and listening activities and the highest attaining students learn to write at length using a wide range of vocabulary. Those in Year 9 and in Key Stage 4 are expected to use the tenses they have learned accurately. Teachers are tenacious and patient in trying to overcome the reluctance of some students to speak with reasonable accuracy. They are consistent in requiring high standards of behaviour and they successfully apply the schools' behaviour policy to ensure that students comply with the code of conduct. Effective use is made of homework to support learning.
190. The modern languages department has good leadership. The schemes of work ensure that statutory requirements are met and that the subject curriculum is broad and balanced. Procedures for the assessment of students' attainment are effective because teachers have a good understanding of their students' achievements and are able to plan to tackle weaknesses. Students are made aware of what they are expected to learn and where they need to improve.

The use of information technology to support students' learning is very limited but there are plans to address this matter. Any weaknesses in provision or attainment must be weighed against the successes of a school and subject department which have been in operation for only four terms.

191. There are sufficient appropriately qualified teachers for the languages to be taught to requirements and the accommodation, in adjacent classrooms, is satisfactory. As yet, no use is made of the corridor area outside the rooms to create the feeling of a languages' area. The department has adequate resources including audio-visual aids.

MUSIC

192. The 1999 GCSE examination was taken by four students so comparison with national data would be invalid. However, students achieved well. These students received lessons out of the normal school day.
193. At the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is broadly in line with national expectations. A small number of students in Key Stage 4 follow the GCSE course out of curriculum hours. Only one lesson was observed after school and therefore, a judgement cannot be made about attainment and teaching in this key stage. Students in Key Stage 3 develop secure rhythmic skills by the end of the key stage and show a satisfactory knowledge of musical vocabulary. This was evident in a Year 9 lesson when students were learning about the structure of a pop song. They were able to talk about riff, vocals and rhythmic patterns, including syncopation and to name accurately the instrumentation. Students use a variety of musical ideas in their compositions and show some fluency in performance. Students in Year 8 composed a short rondo in groups and made appropriate use of repetition, question and answer and dynamics. In a Year 7 lesson students sang with enjoyment, with many students demonstrating an accurate sense of pitch. Throughout the key stage, students' listening skills are developed well through listening to short musical examples of classical and popular music, as well as music from Africa, China and India. These experiences enable students to acquire a satisfactory knowledge of the musical elements, the sounds of instruments and to develop an awareness of different musical styles. However, students' knowledge of the structure and sound of different chords is limited. Students in Key Stage 3 are generally achieving as well as could be expected for their age and levels of prior attainment.
194. Students in Key Stage 3 have good attitudes towards the subject. They enjoy practical activities and work co-operatively when required. The majority of students are well behaved. However, a few in a Year 7 lesson were over enthusiastic and became boisterous which affected the standard of their overall attainment. Students respond well to extra-curricular activities. Students with special educational needs and those who are more musically able make satisfactory progress.
195. Good teaching in Key Stage 3 results in good learning by students. Effective use is made of the teacher's own musical ability to demonstrate to students. This has a positive impact on students' learning and aids their understanding. Lessons are well planned and there is good classroom management so that students are able to learn in an effective environment. Skilled questioning enables students to reinforce and extend their learning. Practically based activities provide opportunities for them to acquire confidence in performing and in expressing their own ideas musically. Focus is given to developing students' rhythmic skills, as in a Year 8 lesson when students accurately identified and repeated different rhythmic patterns and gained an understanding of the ways that these could be notated. Students acquire secure musical skills in the key stage and are becoming confident as performers. They increase their understanding of the way music notation is used to record both pitch and rhythm. They are able to make evaluative comments about their work, to suggest ways that it might be improved and to use their prior learning to support and extend their ideas. Although attention is given to extending students' literacy skills, the amount of written work produced by students is limited. Homework is regularly set and marked and this reinforces the work done in class. Assessment procedures are overall satisfactory, but they do not always chart students' progress in the separate attainment targets of the National Curriculum. Effective use is made of self-assessment by students at the end of a unit of work. The subject makes a satisfactory contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
196. Extra-curricular provision is satisfactory and the activities are attended by nearly 40 students.

Lessons are provided by peripatetic teachers in a range of instruments, including voice. Students have been involved in school concerts and in drama and music productions. They have attended a workshop on the musical *Godspell*. This provision introduces students to a wider range of musical repertoire and extends their awareness of different musical styles. It has a positive impact on promoting students' performing skills.

197. The head of department has done much to establish the subject within the school and has a clear view as to the way the department is to develop, in order to further raise achievement. The accommodation is satisfactory and there are adequate keyboards and classroom instruments for students' use. However, although students have access to the computer suite, there are no computers or software within the department to enable students to devise and refine their compositions.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

198. Assessments by teachers at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 indicated that the majority of fourteen year-olds achieved at national expectations. There is no data as to any differences between boys and girls. In lessons, the attainment of the majority of fourteen year olds meets national expectations in the games and activities taught. The majority of students respond well to the use of effective questioning and use of appropriate terminology by teachers. They are thus developing their speaking and listening skills well. All have a secure understanding of the need for appropriate warm-up before physical exercise. Some take responsibility for aspects of their own warm-up and, for example, name the muscle groups being stretched. In games, students have an awareness as to the importance of developing individual skills through practice. In basketball, for example, passing skills are secure but many students still lack the confidence to look up sufficiently whilst dribbling in both skills drills and competitive games.
199. The attainment of the majority of pupils in Year 11 in lessons is less than the national expectations for their age. This is because of their unsatisfactory levels of prior attainment. The majority of students show an understanding of the need for appropriate warm-up before physical activity but a significant number remains dependent on their teachers in this respect. Individual levels of skills in, for example, basketball are not sufficiently high enough for many, hence their success in playing full games and developing tactics is somewhat limited. There are no significant differences between the attainment of boys and girls.
200. The unsatisfactory level of prior attainment is also having a negative impact on the standards of attainment of those students who are following the GCSE course. In a Year 11 volleyball lesson, for example, students found it difficult to develop successful team play and rallies. Although no theory lessons were observed, a scrutiny of a sample of students' work indicates that they are making satisfactory progress in acquiring a knowledge and understanding of the syllabus requirements. The relatively small number of girls taking the GCSE course does not make it possible to comment on the differences between the progress of boys and girls.
201. Students with special educational needs are well supported and integrated in lessons and make satisfactory progress. A scrutiny of a sample of GCSE physical education folders indicates those students with statements of special educational need make good progress in their learning.
202. Overall, the quality of teaching is satisfactory. In four out of ten lessons, the quality of teaching is good. In six out of ten lessons, the quality is satisfactory. The overall quality of teaching at Key Stage 3 is better and is having a positive impact on the quality of learning and the progress all students make. Students at Key Stage 3 are more receptive to the teaching methods used, whereas in Key Stage 4 the prior attainments of students and the sometimes unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour of some older boys means that teaching is less effective.
203. The overall planning and structure of lessons are indicative of good subject knowledge and understanding. All lessons have a clear structure and learning objectives are shared with students at the start. This ensures students are aware of what is expected of them. Skills are clearly demonstrated and broken down so that students are made further aware of what is expected of them and what they have to do in order to make progress. In a Year 7 gymnastics lesson, for example, this was effectively done when teaching the techniques and skills required for the forward roll. The use of a student to demonstrate the technique, coupled with picture

prompt cards enabled students to learn and thus improve their competencies by the end of the lesson. In a Year 8 boys' rugby union lesson, the effective use of decision-making drills clearly helped students to develop ideas as to whether to pass or run when attacking.

204. Due regard is paid to safety and all teachers ensure appropriate warm-ups take place. Some ensure that students are involved in aspects of this, particularly stretching where students are encouraged to name the muscle groups being stretched. Effective questioning not only allows teachers to establish the extent of students' knowledge and understanding, but also encourages students to develop speaking and listening skills as well as their use of correct terminology. In the great majority of lessons there are opportunities at the start to recap and consolidate previously learned skills and techniques thus students become aware of the developmental aspects of skill acquisition. All teaching allows for students to plan and perform thus increasing their understanding of what they are doing. On occasion, though, there are insufficient opportunities for students to be involved in the evaluation of their own or others' work or for coaching in pairs. In a Year 9 mixed basket ball lesson, for example, there were opportunities for peer evaluation and pair work coaching thus students were becoming more aware of how well they were doing and what they needed to do to make further progress.
205. Sometimes, at the end of lessons, evaluative opportunities tend to be mostly created by the teachers' comments as opposed to students being directly asked to explain their perception of what they have learned. Teachers successfully convey the expectation that all can have success, thus boosting their confidence and motivation. At the same time, students are challenged in all lessons to deepen their knowledge and understanding. The provision of a planned and structured variety of activities in lessons helps ensure concentration, to be productive and to work at a good pace. In a Year 8 mixed dance lesson, for example, students were involved in composing as well as performing. This helped them stay on task, develop their ideas of different poses and increase their appropriateness. Though the few non-participants are usually involved in planned observation tasks, they are not always as fully involved as they should be. Sometimes they are not part of whole group introductions, demonstrations or sessions which round off the lesson.
206. Teachers circulate well and effective and timely intervention ensures students make progress and understand further what is expected of them as, for example, in a Year 10 GCSE table tennis lesson when teaching the correct technique for serving. Good use is made of praise, encouragement and constructive criticism thus ensuring students are becoming aware of their capabilities. Sessions at the end of lessons that sum up the learning are also helpful in this respect. Appropriate homework is set for those students following the GCSE courses as well as tasks for Key Stage 3 students when appropriate. Though GCSE work is consistently marked, the quality of the comments is variable; thus students are not always fully aware of the progress they are making or of what they need to do to improve.
207. The majority of students, apart from a number of boys in Year 11, respect the ethos within which the subject is taught. For example, they work well together in pairs and small groups and are supportive of one another. They also show respect for the capabilities of one another. This means that the atmosphere in lessons is positive and successful learning can take place. The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. There is provision of a good range of extra-curricular provision that further enhances students' learning experiences. The activities provided include recreational, inter-class and inter-school competitive fixtures. There are good links with other sporting organisations and these are of benefit to students, for example, through access to specialist coaching.
208. Though the school has extensive playing fields, some aspects of indoor accommodation are not so good. The small size of the gymnasium has a negative impact on attainment, particularly for older students following the GCSE course and adversely affects the progress made in, for example, basketball. The shared use of the main hall creates problems for curricular provision and the condition of the floor means that it is not really suitable for bare foot dance work. Effective, informative and celebratory displays in and around the department enhance students' learning experiences. The department is well led and managed. There is a clear direction and focus for the work of the department with appropriate emphasis on improving the quality of teaching and raising standards.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

209. The percentage of boys achieving A* to C grades in comparison with other secondary modern schools in Kent is just above average. The percentage of GCSE A* to C grades obtained in 1999 by girls who entered for the full course examination was just below the national average and significantly above the average for secondary modern schools nationally and in Kent. Boys who took the GCSE short course in 1999 attained well below national averages. The inspection found that standards are below the expectations of the Kent Agreed Syllabus at the end of both key stages.
210. By the end of Key Stage 3, many students have a basic knowledge and understanding of the key beliefs and practices of Christianity, Judaism and other world religions represented in Britain but this knowledge lacks depth and contextual detail. Students in Year 9 studying the Jewish festival of Succoth, for example, are able to describe the festival and have some understanding of what it represents but find it difficult to remember details of other Jewish festivals, such as Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Students of differing attainment often lack the confidence to use specialist religious language accurately and systematically, particularly in discussion or when reading aloud. Many students are developing sound skills in empathy and reflection, evident for example in Year 8, when they learn about the exile of the Jews or in Year 7, when they compare the Hindu story of Rama and Sita with other stories with a similar theme. For higher attaining students, literacy standards are about average, but generally skills in writing, reading and in presenting an argument are weak.
211. The attainment of most 16 year-olds is below national expectations overall. However, many students have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of moral issues such as euthanasia and abortion and are beginning to identify and respond to questions of meaning within religions. This was evident in Year 11 work on the concept of a just war, when some students looked at the Second World War and others examined the Muslim and Christian points of view on the Gulf War. Specialist detailed knowledge and understanding of religious traditions and practices is below average so that, for example, students in Year 11 are able to identify objects that symbolise a Christian wedding but struggle to understand the meanings behind the symbols.
212. Teaching in both key stages is satisfactory overall, with nearly 40 percent of lessons seen being good. One lesson at Key Stage 3 was unsatisfactory teaching as time was not used well and insufficient attention was paid to presenting Christianity as the main religion in Britain rather than as the norm by which other religions are examined. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of what they are teaching are otherwise secure and the enthusiasm with which topics are taught succeeds in motivating and challenging most students. Teachers work hard to establish clear expectations of how to behave and most students respond by being attentive and co-operating sensibly. A small minority of boys, particularly in Key Stage 4, are easily distracted and need frequent reminding to stay on task and on a few occasions, behaviour is not controlled effectively by teachers. Curriculum planning is good overall and students are provided with a wide range of tasks and activities. The use of artefacts and relevant modern examples to illustrate points enables students to develop positive attitudes towards religious education in both key stages and helps them to learn. Students in Year 8, for example, studying exile and liberation in Judaism compared Psalm 137 with the Boney M song *By the Rivers of Babylon*. Insufficient attention is paid to the use of questioning students in order to check and reinforce their knowledge and understanding and to further develop their speaking and listening skills.
213. Management of the subject is good. There is a clear vision for the development of the department and good support is provided for non-specialist teachers. Teachers work well as a team and are clearly committed to raising attainment in the subject. Departmental documentation is thorough and thoughtful. Currently there are no visits or speakers to stimulate and enrich students' understanding. Also there is very little systematic use of information technology within the subject. Religious education makes a positive contribution towards students' spiritual development through methods which help students to develop their reflective skills in Key Stage 3. Statutory requirements to provide religious education in the sixth form are not being met.

VOCATIONAL AND BUSINESS EDUCATION

214. GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification) courses are options in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, where courses are largely vocational in character. At Key Stage 4, GNVQ

Part One courses in information and communications technology, health and social care and leisure and tourism are studied by a large proportion of the year group at foundation or intermediate level. In the sixth form, intermediate and advanced level groups run in art, business studies, health and social care and leisure and tourism, a newly introduced course. The number of students taking GNVQ courses has risen steadily since the new school opened. In addition, an information technology (IT) course at GNVQ, together with a key skills course, is planned for September 2000. A new GCSE business studies group will take their examination in summer 2000.

215. Although standards of work in all vocational and business subjects in lessons seen and in scrutiny of coursework portfolios are below the national average for all schools they are in line with GNVQ completion rates and, for GCSE, the national average for business studies for secondary modern schools (35%). As numbers on intermediate GNVQ courses are small, it is not valid to make comparisons with national completion rates. Students' achievement in Key Stage 4 and sixth form lessons and over time is generally what would be expected for their age and prior attainment. Students with special educational needs achieve better than might be expected when they receive additional learning support in class. The majority of students make good progress over time in gaining work-related knowledge and improving their key skills of information technology, number and communications. As they move up the school from Year 10, students become better at researching in local industry and work experience placements. Students' ability to plan, monitor and evaluate their assignments is less well developed.
216. In Key Stage 4 GCSE business studies, students use computers well to draw clear graphs of what local teenagers like to read and they create payslips on spreadsheets. Higher attaining students link manufacturers' chocolate brands to a variety of target markets. GNVQ students use CD ROMs to research jobs in the travel and tourist industry and prepare their curriculum vitae and letters applying for jobs. Students discuss relationships in health and social care and in IT lessons use desk top publishing to produce spider diagrams to consolidate the theory they have learnt.

217. In sixth form art, students show a good capacity for independent study and an ability to use information and communications technology by scanning aerial photographs of a village with a digital camera, designing and making cups and saucers and producing paintings of a good standard. One GNVQ art student on work experience designed and painted a mural at a local primary school. Intermediate leisure and tourism students video their presentations to each other on a team event to raise money for charity. Advanced business studies students develop understanding of financial ratios, borrowing and the effects of interest payments. Their calculations are accurate although many students find it difficult to explain concepts in depth. Advanced health and social care students use a stethograph to measure their pulse rates whilst using an exercise bike and use the computer data generated to produce reports on their own fitness. At both key stages, overall standards in the key skills of number, information technology and communication are moderate. Spreadsheets are not fully used to model the possible consequences of increasing receipts and payments or making alterations to personal diets and fitness levels. Few students combine text and graphics effectively in publicity brochures, and well-presented assignments are spoiled by poor spelling. In all GNVQ subjects, a minority of students at each key stage obtain merit or distinction grades for planning and evaluating their work in sufficient depth but students' presented work is often spoiled by uncorrected spellings, and written answers at intermediate and advanced level frequently lack critical analysis. Not all students can clearly and fluently explain the significance of basic terms in their subject area.
218. Teaching in GNVQ and business studies at both key stages is never less than satisfactory and is good or very good in nearly three-quarters of all lessons seen during the inspection resulting in learning where the majority of students make good progress in acquiring work-related knowledge and key skills in communication, number and IT. Teachers are experienced and have good knowledge of their subjects and industry. They have appropriate expectations of students and the ability to pace lessons quickly through a variety of short tasks that keep students interested, behaving well, and concentrating on completing their tasks. Students with special educational needs are given relevant tasks although there is scope for adapting some tasks to meet the several levels of attainment within a class.
219. Teaching is least successful where students are taught in rows or where staff have to carry out additional planning to cope with intermediate and advanced GNVQ levels within one class. Over time this reduces total teaching time, support, the pace at which students learn, and completion rates for courses. Some GCSE lessons and GNVQ lessons at both key stages are less effective where insufficient access to computers limits students continuity of learning, and reduces progress in IT. Teachers' well-planned lessons and enthusiasm help students develop pride in their work and a desire to meet the set deadlines. Teachers support students closely, for the most part, and assess them carefully using criteria laid down by the examining board, grading work accurately. GNVQ students usually receive prompt feedback on their completed assignments, and are aware of ways they can improve. The assessment and recording of key skills is less consistent and students are not given sufficient responsibility to track their own learning so that they can be more aware of what they still need to achieve. Some subjects include self-assessment checklists that help students identify their own strengths and weaknesses.
220. In the best practice, teachers introduce new topics briefly and follow this with practical group activities for students to develop teamwork skills and improve their ability to research within and outside school rather than depend on the teacher to decide how they learn. Newspaper articles are used to extend students' literacy by helping them to summarise topical articles and present critical findings to their peers.