

INSPECTION REPORT

WOLGARSTON HIGH SCHOOL

Penkridge

LEA area: Staffordshire

Unique reference number: 124415

Headteacher: Mrs L Cook

Reporting inspector: Dr Eric Blaire
3601

Dates of inspection: 11 – 15 December 2000

Inspection number: 223704

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	13 - 18
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Cannock Road Penkridge Staffordshire
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr D Warburton
Date of previous inspection:	29 January 1996

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Mr John Lovell - 14756	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development
			How well the school cares for its students
			How well the school works in partnership with parents
Ms Betty Barratt - 2740	Team inspector	History	The school's results and achievements
			How well the students are taught
Ms P Hanage - 8756	Team inspector	Equality of opportunity	Curricular and other opportunities
Ms R Hobson - 31135	Team inspector	English	
Mr D Jones - 3643	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Mr S Rawcliffe - 20420	Team inspector	Science	
Mr M Pennington - 13054	Team inspector	Modern languages	
Mr M Merchant - 27368	Team inspector	Geography	
Ms P Draycott - 14876	Team inspector	Religious education	
Ms T McIntosh - 11975	Team inspector	Music	
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Mr J Bowden - 7926	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
		Physical education	
Mr G Preston - 1990	Team inspector	Design and technology	
		Information and communication technology	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This is a mixed comprehensive high school. It is situated on the eastern side of Penkridge, a large village, six miles from Stafford, serving a largely advantaged area. Almost all students are drawn from the local middle schools at Brewood and Penkridge itself. The school caters for students in the 13-18 age range. It has 781 students on roll; with 183 in Years 12 and 13, this is smaller than most other secondary schools with a sixth form. The school is popular locally. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals, at six per cent, is below average, as is the proportion of students registered as having special educational needs. The proportion of students for whom a statement of special educational needs exists is now average. Overall, students join the school with above average levels of attainment. There are no students who are beginning to learn English.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school, which has many very good features, and its strengths greatly outweigh its weaknesses. The school has made good progress since the last inspection and is well placed to achieve further progress. The school has particular strengths in its post-16 provision where teaching and provision are good and in the opportunities it provides for students' personal development. Standards reached are above average in all key stages. Overall, teaching and learning are good throughout the school. The school is effectively managed, its post-16 provision is cost-effective and overall the school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Teaching is good and students achieve well throughout the school.
- Attainment is improving significantly, especially at Key Stage 4 and post-16.
- The headteacher provides good leadership and clear direction.
- The school has very good links with its partner schools, the local college and the wider community.
- The school helps students to develop into mature and responsible students.
- It is improving provision for modern foreign languages.
- Provision for moral development is very good.
- Provides effective induction for staff new to the school.

What could be improved

- Further raising levels of attainment.
- Consistency in aspects of teaching, including levels of challenge and opportunities for students of all ages to take responsibility for their learning.
- Provision for information and communication technology, music and religious education.
- Levels of participation by middle managers in aspects of the school's work.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in January 1996. Since then it has made good progress. The school has achieved significant improvement in all areas except that for provision of a daily act of collective worship. The inspection identified seven key issues for improvement, all of which were addressed by the governing body in a detailed and thorough action plan. The school has made good progress in ensuring that the most able students reach consistently high standards and the provision for students with special educational needs has improved, including targeted support for literacy. Examination results have risen. Since the last inspection the quality of teaching has improved significantly: the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching has fallen from around 20 per cent to five per cent, and the proportion of very good or better teaching which was very small is now raised to 28 per cent. Very good progress has been made in modern languages and this is now a strength of the school. Good progress has been made in several aspects of design and technology. Weaknesses remain in the curriculum provision for information and communication technology and religious education. Provision for spiritual and cultural development has been progressed and that for cultural development is now good. Steps have been taken to improve the quality of collective worship, but the school still falls short of the statutory requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship.

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
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	B	B	A	C
A-levels/AS-levels	D	B	A	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

Standards at Key Stages 3 and 4 have risen in line with improvements nationally over the last three years, with the GCSE results in 2000 showing a marked improvement. Standards also improved significantly at GCE Advanced level in 2000 and results are now well above the national average. The Key Stage 3 results in the core subjects are well above the average for students of a similar age nationally, and are also above the averages, when taken together, in schools with a similar proportion of students eligible for free school meals. In 2000, attainment in the National Curriculum tests in mathematics and science was well above the averages nationally for all schools, and the results in English were above average. The students' performance in the English and science tests was typical of that in similar schools, whereas in mathematics it was better. The GCSE results in 2000 were well above the average for all schools and in line with that for similar schools. The analysis of the 2000 GCSE results as a whole shows that students achieved very well at the highest grades of A* and A. The standards reached in English, mathematics and science were well above average in all three subjects. When compared with similar schools, results were above average in English and mathematics and well above average in science. The pattern of improvement at all stages was reflected in the work seen during the inspection. Standards were judged to be above average at all stages clearly indicating that the targets set for attainment at GCSE in 2001 are realistically challenging. The standards being reached in English at Key Stage 4 were well above average, as were those in design and technology and art at post-16. Well above average standards were also seen in geography at both Key Stage 3 and post-16. Attainment in music at Key Stage 3, however, was below average. The standards reached by students show that all, including those with special educational needs, achieve well in comparison with their attainment at the beginning of each key stage.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. The significant majority of students enjoy coming to school and are eager to learn. Most students want to do their best, listen carefully to their teachers and show interest in their work.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Students are courteous to visitors. They generally behave well in class and around the school. A minority of students behave in an immature way.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Students work well together, both in lessons and in other school activities. Relationships are positive and students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own environment. Many older students become involved in helping younger students both with work and leading them in extra-curricular activities.
Attendance	Attendance is satisfactory, being broadly in line with the national average for secondary schools.

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.

Teaching is good throughout the school but it is stronger at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3, and strongest at post-16. In the lessons seen during the inspection teaching was satisfactory or better in 95 per cent, in 46 per cent it was good, 18 per cent was very good and in three per cent it was excellent. Four per cent of the teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory and one per cent was poor. Teaching is good in English, mathematics and science throughout the school. In other subjects teaching is strongest in geography, where 67 per cent was very good or better, and in history, modern languages and physical education where teaching was at least good in about 80 per cent of lessons. In the remaining subjects teaching was more varied in quality especially in design and technology, information and communication technology and music, where despite half of the teaching being good, and in design and technology often very good, some was unsatisfactory. In music, there was also some teaching at Key Stage 3 that was poor. The teaching of literacy and numeracy skills is good. Students with special educational needs are enabled to make good progress by good teaching and effective support by classroom assistants. The teaching of the highest attaining students is also good overall but at times is insufficiently challenging. Students' learning, including that of students with special educational needs, is good overall at Key Stages 3 and 4 and post-16. There are, however, times when the rate of learning in lessons is slowed by the pace of work being too slow. There are insufficient opportunities for students to take initiative in their learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Curriculum provision is good, with strengths in Key Stage 4 and post-16. However, time provision is limited for information and communication technology and physical education at Key Stage 3 and for religious education at Key Stage 4 and post-16. Curriculum planning and delivery benefit from excellent partnerships with the middle schools and the Stafford College.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Overall provision is good. Students make good progress in their lessons, whether whole class or withdrawal groups. The requirements of the national Code of Practice are fully met.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good provision. The principles of care, courtesy and consideration are well fostered and provide a useful framework for supporting students' development. Provision for moral development is very good. There are good opportunities for students to develop an understanding of their own culture but there is less emphasis on understanding other cultures.
How well the school cares for its students	Good. There is a strong commitment to students' achievements and welfare, with good procedures to support them. Students' progress is monitored and supported well. Teachers know their students well. Key stage leaders provide strong pastoral support.
Partnership with parents	Most parents have a high opinion of the school, which takes care to maintain good links with them. The quality of information provided for parents is satisfactory, but reports to parents are not always sufficiently clear about how their children are to be supported to make further progress.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The aims of the school are clearly expressed and reflected in its work. The headteacher provides clear and well-focused direction. Leadership by curriculum leaders is good, and in some instances, very good. Procedures for the monitoring of teaching by senior managers are good but involvement by curriculum team leaders should be increased.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors show firm commitment to, and involvement with the school and its work. The school does not comply with all statutory requirements with regard to music and religious education, and the provision of a daily act of collective worship.
The school's evaluation of its performance	There is a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. The school collects and analyses useful data on attainment effectively and it is well used to improve several aspects of performance. It has yet to ensure that self-evaluation and data analysis are carried out with the same level of rigour in all subject areas. Practices around equal opportunities are carefully audited.
The strategic use of resources	Good financial control. Special funds allocated to the school are carefully deployed. By equally careful deployment, staffing, learning resources and accommodation are found adequate. The school makes good use of the principles of best value.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school expects students to work hard and achieve their best. • The good progress that students make. • Students like school. • Parents feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem. • The good leadership and management of the school. • The school helps students to become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of homework given to students. • The way in which the school works with parents. • The information provided to parents about students' progress. • Standards of behaviour. • The range of activities provided outside lessons.

Most parents are pleased with the school and the education it provides. The inspection team agrees with all the parents' positive comments and also that there is a need to provide greater consistency in the amount of homework given and when. However, the inspectors found no evidence of significant difficulties in the way the school works with parents nor in the information it provides to parents about students' progress, except in Year 9. Inspectors found that standards of behaviour are good and that there is a good range of activities provided outside lessons.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1 Standards at Key Stages 3 and 4 have risen in line with the trend of improvement nationally over the last three years. In 2000 however, the GCSE results improved significantly especially in the proportion of students gaining the highest grades of A* and A. Standards also improved significantly at GCE Advanced Level in 2000 leading to results which were well above the national average.

2 At the end of Key Stage 3, students achieve levels which are well above the average for students of a similar age nationally, and which are also above the averages in schools with a similar proportion of students eligible for free school meals. In 2000, attainment in the National Curriculum tests in mathematics and science was well above the averages nationally for all schools, and the results in English were above average. The results in mathematics were also well above the average for similar schools. In English and science, the results matched the average. When compared with students' above average attainment on entry to the school, the standards reached overall at the end of Key Stage 3 represent good achievement.

3 At Key Stage 4, the 5 or more grades A*-C GCSE results in 2000 were significantly better than in 1999 rising to well above the average for all schools, and above that for similar schools. The improvement in the proportion of students gaining grades A* and A was especially marked. The results were well above average in all three core subjects. When compared with the results in similar schools, they were above average in English and mathematics, and well above the average in science. Overall these results indicate good progress when compared with the standards students reached at the end of Key Stage 3. However, the analysis of the 2000 GCSE results shows that despite significantly improving standards between 1999 and 2000, the average total GCSE point score per pupil is only now in line with that for similar schools.

4 The results at GCE Advanced level have been close to national average averages over the last three years, and in 2000 they rose to well above the national average. Comparison with the students' attainment at GCSE indicates that these results represent good achievement.

5 The pattern of improvement at all stages was reflected in the work seen during the inspection. Standards were judged to be above average at all stages, and those at Key Stage 4 confirmed that the targets set for attainment at GCSE in 2001 are realistically challenging. The standards being reached in some subjects were particularly impressive. For example, those in English at Key Stage 4 were well above average, with students demonstrating a good range of literacy strengths including extended and accurate writing, and the use of literary analysis to show how and why writers create particular effects. Standards were also well above average in geography, especially at Key Stage 3 and post-16. For instance, Year 9 students' knowledge and understanding of coastal erosion and deposition were at a level more usually found at GCSE. Students' geographical skills of evaluation and interpretation are well-developed at all key stages, but are particularly impressive post-16. This was shown, for example, in the work of Year 12 students in their analysis of arguments and arrival at reasons for sustained development. Standards are also well above average in art with post-16 students very skilfully using a wide range of media for thematic interpretations.

6 Standards were relatively weaker, despite matching the average overall, at Key Stage 3 in design and technology. Most students had below average practical skills in design and technology, students can satisfactorily solder and assemble a model traffic light, but struggle to cut accurately and shape timber. There were also weaknesses at Key Stage 4 in the extent of students' knowledge and understanding in religious education because access to both is restricted by too little time being allocated for the subject. In music, there were weaknesses in students' attainment throughout the school and especially at Key Stage 3.

7 Students achieve very good standards of literacy. Their reading skills are good. They develop a wide range of vocabulary, which they use to good effect. They respond well to texts both in English and across the curriculum. For example, they use their reading skills very effectively in history both in accessing information in textbooks and in interpreting historical sources. Higher ability students are very competent in using difficult texts in historical research post-16. Listening skills are well developed. Students listen carefully to each other and to their teachers, and ask pertinent and relevant questions. Writing skills develop very well. Essay writing becomes increasingly detailed, well structured and accurate. Students express themselves well orally but some only when they have the support of notes or texts.

8 Good standards are achieved in numeracy skills especially post-16, which enable students to cope well on leaving school and with the next stages of their education. Students handle number and measurement, mentally, orally and in writing very well in design and technology, geography, mathematics and science. Spatial awareness is also effectively developed. For example, in Year 9 art, students develop skills in perspective and graphics through clay work. In Key Stage 4 these skills are further developed through three dimensional construction wire-plaster work in art, and in three dimensional trigonometry with the higher attainers in mathematics and various graphical projections in design and technology. In geography and science, students develop their skills in the analysis, interpretation and presentation of data provided numerically and graphically. Students develop their skills in the interpretation of statistics in design and technology and information communication technology at Key Stage 4 and in history, geography and economics in Years 12 and 13. In geography, students are competent at calculating means and drawing scatter graphs.

9 The good achievement shown in the test and examination results is confirmed by the standards being achieved during the inspection. Students achieve well throughout the school. Attainment of both boys and girls is above the national average, but boys achieve higher than girls at GCSE in both mathematics and science. No significant differences in attainment in mathematics and science were found among current students. In modern languages boys do well compared with boys nationally, but the gap with girls' particularly high achievement is still wider than the national average. Students with special educational needs achieve well as a result of the good provision made to meet their learning needs. This includes clear and well-targeted teaching, the good support in lessons by classroom assistants and the opportunities across the curriculum for them to participate fully in all aspects of learning. Students of very high ability also achieve well. Their achievement is well supported by their very positive attitudes to learning and often by very good teaching, especially post-16. There are some occasions, however, when their progress in lessons is slower because too little is expected of them, especially in taking initiative and responsibility for their learning.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

10. Students' attitudes to learning are good and have a positive impact on standards of achievement across the school. Students come to school expecting to learn and to make good progress. They are interested in their work, especially when lessons are purposeful and the quality of teaching is good. Their level of involvement in the general life of the school and extra-curricular activities is good. Students enjoy undertaking responsibilities within the school and are committed to fulfilling their roles, such as in serving on the Key Stage 3 Committee and the Key Stage 4 and post-16 Councils.

11 The attitudes and behaviour of post-16 students are never less than satisfactory and very good

or better in the majority of lessons. In Key Stages 3 and 4, attitudes and behaviour are good or better in the majority of lessons but are occasionally unsatisfactory. The majority of students show interest and enthusiasm for their work, particularly when the pace and challenge is appropriate. The standard of behaviour in lessons and around the school is good and this is reflected in the low rate of exclusion, which is below the national average. There were three fixed period exclusions in the last academic year, which is half the number in the year preceding the previous inspection. However, a minority of students behave inappropriately in lessons and seek to disrupt the learning of others, particularly in Key Stage 4. Students are generally courteous and polite to teachers and to each other and recognise the need to create an effective learning environment in which all students can learn. When teachers' expectations are clear and tasks challenge students' abilities, they work productively and collaborate very well. For example, students in a Year 9 personal, social and health education lesson very effectively organised themselves in small groups to review a selection of newspapers and identify key stories, remaining absorbed in the activity and engaging in very good discussion to agree their choices and listening to each other very carefully, respecting differing perspectives on news items. Students are trustworthy and show respect for the school's and other people's property and in lessons they use equipment with care. Students behave well out of class and conform with the expected standards of behaviour during the lunch break and when moving between lessons although, on occasions, a minority lack a sense of urgency when moving between lessons. Students respect the school's rules which are clearly set out in the student handbooks. Oppressive or aggressive behaviour is rare. Students consider that although some bullying does take place, there is no evidence of systematic bullying and they are confident that any incidents are addressed quickly and effectively. They value the opportunities which have been provided for them to consider the impact of bullying and the willingness of all staff to listen to them and provide support in resolving such issues and in seeking to reconcile relationship difficulties.

12 The quality of relationships throughout the school, between students and between students and staff, is good. Students trust their teachers and feel comfortable about turning to them for support and guidance. Students work well together in lessons in pairs and groups, and have good respect for other people's feelings and beliefs. They show a very good understanding and consideration for the needs of others, which is developed through support of charities and activities in the local community. These are selected by students and have involved them in activities such as organising a Christmas party for local senior citizens and raising money, through non-uniform days, for a local hospice.

13 Students with statements of special educational needs are positive and very appreciative of the support they have received from the special needs department throughout their time in the school. This support has clearly had an impact as evidenced by their positive attitudes to learning and the school. Students with statements of special educational needs comment favourably on the ethos of inclusion within the school.

14 Students of all ages respond positively to opportunities to exercise responsibility throughout the school. Students elect representatives to serve on the Key Stage 3 Committee, Key Stage 4 and post-16 Councils. Through these bodies, students are consulted and involved in making decisions that have a real impact on their environment and the quality of the community of the school. For example, the Key Stage 3 Committee has conducted a survey on bullying and members are involved in further developing anti-bullying strategies. Post-16 students meet governors and make presentations on their needs and suggestions for improving facilities and opportunities. Students show initiative and maturity when carrying out these duties.

15 Overall attendance is satisfactory and has remained at a similar level in recent years. In 1999/2000 17 per cent of all students had excellent levels of attendance whilst 13 per cent had poor or very poor attendance. However, overall attendance was 91.8 per cent with 7.5 per cent authorised absence and 0.7 per cent unauthorised absence. The increase in the level of unauthorised absence over that in the previous year (0.3 per cent) was due to particular problems associated with two school refusers. In 1998/9 attendance was broadly similar to that of other schools nationally. Punctuality is good and instances of lateness are usually associated with delays in the arrival of the school buses. These levels of attendance have a positive impact on students' progress.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

16 Teaching is good throughout the school but it is stronger at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3, and strongest post-16. In the lessons seen during the inspection, teaching was satisfactory or better in 95 per cent, in 46 per cent it was good, in 18 per cent it was very good and in three per cent it was excellent. Four per cent of the teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory and one per cent was poor. Post-16, 82 per cent of the teaching was at least good, 27 per cent very good, five per cent excellent and none was less than satisfactory. There was less good or better teaching at Key Stage 3, where it amounted to 50 per cent, than in Key Stage 4, where 70 per cent was of such quality. There was also more teaching which was less than satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and this included some which was poor. There was no poor teaching at Key Stage 4. The amount of unsatisfactory teaching is much less than at the time of the last inspection and there is now more good or better teaching. However, practice remains weakest at Key Stage 3 and teaching is excellent in only a very few lessons, which are mostly post-16.

17 Teaching is good throughout the school in English, mathematics and science. In other subjects it is strongest in geography, where 67 per cent was very good or better, and in history, modern languages and physical education where teaching was at least good in about 80 per cent of lessons and much was very good and in some instances, excellent. In the remaining subjects, teaching was more varied in quality. This was especially the case in design and technology, information and communication technology and music, where despite half of the teaching being good, and in design technology often very good, some was unsatisfactory. In music, there was also some teaching at Key Stage 3 that was poor. Lack of Key Stage 3 curriculum information impacted upon the quality of music teaching by supply teachers.

18 Students' learning benefits from the skilful sharing of the teachers' good subject expertise in most subjects across the curriculum. Clear teaching and explanation enabling students to draw upon the teachers' expertise to understand things they find difficult are strengths in many subjects and are especially well exemplified at all key stages in English, modern languages, geography and history. For example, in a Year 10 English lesson introducing students to characters and themes in Willy Russell's *Educating Rita*, the teacher's enthusiasm, specialist knowledge and high expectations enabled students to make very good gains in understanding significant parts of the play. Teachers' good expertise also facilitates the good development of skills such as those in literacy and numeracy, and those which are subject specific such as language skills in modern languages, which are fostered well by skilled linguists, and historical skills which are especially well developed as a result of the teachers' strengths as historians. The teachers' very good expertise in geography is also used very effectively to foster skills development, and to set very high expectations such as those at post-16 which lead to students using materials of first year university level.

19 There are, however, too many instances when teachers do not make enough use of their subject expertise to challenge students at an appropriately high level. For example, in a post-16 physics lesson the teacher's good expertise was used very well to provide clear exposition, but the over long delivery slowed the pace of learning and failed to challenge the students sufficiently. In English, students could achieve even more at times if learning was less dependent on the teacher and there were more opportunities for students to explore ideas for themselves in groups, take part in role-play or be involved in more active ways of learning. The same is true of history where very good subject expertise inspires students to share their teachers' enthusiasm for the subject, but their capacity to work at full stretch intellectually and to think laterally is too often restricted by the learning being over controlled, and in particular, by the lack of opportunities for students to develop their ideas through being actively involved in discussion. The lack of discussion limits learning in several subjects. In mathematics, for instance, the lack of opportunities for students to discuss the most effective methods restricts their capacity to explore different ways of solving of problems.

20 Lessons are well planned to achieve clear learning objectives. Many begin with good use of questioning to enable students to build on earlier learning including that in Years 7 and 8. But often

questioning is insufficiently challenging, used to check knowledge and understanding, but not specifically to probe and extend students' thinking. Good lesson planning also often results in students' interest and concentration being aroused and sustained by well timed and clearly focused activities, a brisk and purposeful pace of work. Lesson planning overall is effective in ensuring activities are clearly focused on promoting learning. For example, in modern languages the planning of activities which are well timed and matched to students' learning requirements results in students' working hard on practising their skills and learning with confidence. On the other hand, there are some exceptions to this good pattern, for instance, in music where learning at Key Stage 3 especially is inhibited because tasks are not well structured and time is poorly used. The timing of activities is not always well planned in science either, resulting in students' depth of understanding being limited because introductions to lessons are rushed.

21 Learning is enhanced in most lessons by a good working ethos created by good relationships, good behaviour and skilful management of the lesson as a whole, including that of any disruption to the learning resulting from poor behaviour. There are instances where this is not the case and they are often coupled with activities not being sufficiently demanding and the teachers' weaker skills in behaviour management. Less effective behaviour management and too low expectations in a lesson on resistant materials resulted in disruption and a loss of pace in the learning.

22 Students' achievement is tracked closely especially at Key Stage 4 and post-16. Work is marked regularly and usually thoroughly but the quality of the guidance to students on how to improve their standards varies especially at Key Stage 3. The quality of homework also varies. It is used well at Key Stage 4 and post-16 to extend the work of lessons and to foster study skills. Practice at Key Stage 3, however, varies especially in the extent to which homework is planned and set as an integral part of learning.

23 Students with special educational needs are enabled to make good progress by good teaching and effective support by learning support assistants. Their needs are well known and met through clear and well-targeted teaching, and materials being well planned to assist their learning. The teaching of the highest attaining students is also good but at times is insufficiently challenging.

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

24 The school's clearly stated aim, to provide a broad and balanced curriculum accessible to all, successfully influences the design and delivery of the curriculum. The quality and range of learning opportunities are satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and post-16. The requirements of the National Curriculum are met, with the exception of religious education at Key Stage 4 and post-16, and the use of information and communication technology in music at Key Stage 3. Students' learning opportunities are enriched by good extra-curricular activities, and a good careers programme. Students have equality of access and opportunity to available courses and activities. Excellent links with partner middle schools contribute to the well-planned progression of work from Year 8 to Year 9. Excellent links with Stafford College of Further Education help the school to provide a wide, and developing, choice of subjects for post-16 students.

25 The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory, broad and relevant. All students study two modern foreign languages; continuing with French, taught in the partner middle schools, and beginning Spanish. Information and communication technology is taught as a discrete subject but the time available for this is low, as it is only taught in one nine-week module. Although students use their information and communication technology skills in some other areas of the curriculum, the balance of the curriculum is adversely affected by the lack of sufficient opportunities to develop and extend their expertise. There are not enough planned opportunities in music for students to use information and communication technology.

26 The curriculum provision at Key Stage 4 is good. All students take double science and full courses in design and technology and in a modern foreign language. Nearly all students in Years 10 and

11 take history or geography. Students have a choice from one option group, as well as a choice in design and technology. The organisation of the curriculum helps students to specialise in some areas if they wish to do so, making their curriculum more relevant to them. For example, they can study art and music, or history and geography. A second modern foreign language is offered in the option block, and a small number choose this. Virtually all courses in Key Stage 4 lead to GCSE accreditation. The school's curriculum plan for September 2001 shows opportunities for wider accreditation in information technology and religious education as part of the strategy to increase the average total GCSE point score per pupil. The options include sociology, information technology and business studies, and child development. Good support is provided, through individual mentoring, for a small group of students who are not motivated by some parts of their work. This approach seems to be working satisfactorily. The quality of the religious education course is good, and is an important contribution, for example, through a module on racism, to students' preparation for living in a multicultural society. However, the time provided for religious education is insufficient to cover the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus.

27 The curriculum for post-16 students is good. There is a good range of courses, about 20 subjects, at Advanced level (Advanced Subsidiary in Year 12), and limited GNVQ provision, in business studies, at Advanced level (Advanced Level Vocational Certificate of Education in Year 12). The links with Stafford College of Further Education, through the third session held after the school day, have helped the school to provide this variety. Recently, in this third session, tutorials have been introduced to provide more academic input. For example, there was a statistics workshop for a Year 12 psychology class during the week of the inspection, to help them with the skills needed for an assignment. There are also opportunities in this after-school session for students to re-sit GCSE examinations in English and mathematics. The tutorial support for all students, and the general ethos of post-16 work, encourages students to take increasing responsibility for organising their time effectively. The topic for Year 13 tutorials during the week of the inspection was revision techniques, helping students to prepare for examinations in January. Students are encouraged to contribute to whole-school activities. An example of this is the strong lead taken by post-16 students in organising the recent successful production of *Joseph and his Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*.

28 There is a well-planned and delivered induction programme for Year 12 students. All subjects use an induction assignment to introduce students to Advanced level work, to help them with the transition to the different demands of study post-16.

29 The provision for the personal, social and health education of students is good throughout the school. The programme, including health and sex education, is well planned. It is effectively delivered, mainly by form tutors, with good use of other adults at specific points in the cycle. Students' opinions are sought in a number of ways. Examples include a survey on bullying, and an annual survey of students' attitudes to school. The latter is carried out anonymously during tutorials and any issues arising are acted on. For example, student feedback influenced the revision of part of the Year 13 personal, social and health education programme.

30 The school's equal opportunities policy provides a clear statement of entitlement, and indicates the type of action required from departments. Members of the senior management team monitor this. Student grouping arrangements in both Key Stages 3 and 4 are usually satisfactory in providing equality of access to the curriculum. The arrangements for modern foreign language in Key Stage 3 give all students a grounding in a second modern language, widening their available choices in Key Stage 4.

31 The special needs department's policy of in-class support, along with a structured programme of targeted one-to-one withdrawal sessions, ensures all students identified as having special educational needs are able to access the full curriculum. There are no students disapplied from the National Curriculum. When appropriate, the special needs department organises special arrangements for

examinations to help and support further those students identified as having special educational needs. Overall, curricular provision across Key Stages 3 and 4 is satisfactory. Weaknesses recently recognised from a management review of provision, together with the resulting work of an assistant headteacher acting as special educational needs co-ordinator, have meant provision for special educational needs has improved. Individual education plans are of good quality and the requirements of the Code of Practice are fully met and the register of special needs is effectively organised and up-to-date.

32 The school started a Key Stage 3 literacy and a numeracy programme in September 1997 and a joint project was established with partner middle schools to support writing and curriculum continuity in mathematics. All students in Year 9 follow well-planned and effectively delivered literacy and numeracy modules in their personal, social and health education lessons. One of the features of the literacy programme is the subject key words booklet that helps to promote good spelling in all subjects. Progress has been made in developing a whole-school policy for literacy at Key Stage 4. In modern foreign languages, for example, very good attention is paid to key words and correct grammatical expressions. In geography there are 'word walls' and excellent displays of students' work which provide good provision for literacy. In some subjects, however, technical vocabulary is not on obvious display in classrooms and there is no general agreement as to how to reinforce literacy. Whole-school numeracy developments are less fully progressed than those for literacy but both developments have had a positive impact upon student competence in these areas.

33 The provision for extra-curricular activities is good. Many students play in leagues and competitions on a weekly basis. Several individuals have gained representative honours at district, county and regional level in a range of sports. There is a tradition of school productions, some combining music with drama. Post-16 students play a key role in organising these. In January 2000, the entire school visited the Dome as part of the Millennium Module. There is a very good programme of exchange visits and some opportunities for work experience abroad. The choir has participated in many community events, such as joining with other schools at the Millennium Concert in Lichfield Cathedral in October. Students also raise money for different charities.

34 The school makes good provision for careers education and guidance. Impartial advice is provided for opportunities post-16 in work, school and further education. Good advice on option choices is provided at the end of Year 9, and all students in Key Stage 4 and post-16 have good access to careers advice and individual interviews with a careers adviser are available to all. Transitional and annual reviews are effective and support students identified as having special educational needs as they move through the school and beyond. The school is well supported by the Staffordshire Careers' Service and the Staffordshire Partnership. All Year 11 students are able to undertake one week's work experience, during which they maintain a record. The support provided, through specific careers advice and tutorials, addresses the needs of students and actively engages them in taking responsibility for decision making to help them reach well informed choices. Students have access to a range of materials and computer guidance software, although display space for careers resources within the library is limited and some, such as CD-ROMs, are not on display.

35 The school has excellent links with its first and middle principal feeder schools, which benefit the continuity of students' learning, ongoing assessment and transfer arrangements. Regular meetings are held to discuss matters of common concern and to ensure that the curriculum is fully covered without students unnecessarily repeating work when they transfer between schools. The schools have adopted a common assessment strategy to benefit the transfer of data between them and the tracking of students' progress as they move through the three tier system. Links to support the transfer of students with special education needs and to reassure their parents over any concerns are well established. These links all have a very good impact on students' progress.

36 The issues raised in the last inspection report have mostly been successfully addressed. Equal opportunities policies are included in handbooks for each curriculum area and their implementation is monitored. There is still insufficient time for religious education at Key Stage 4 and post-16.

37 The school makes good provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its students. It succeeds in providing a happy and purposeful environment. The principles of care, courtesy and consideration are well fostered and provide a useful framework for supporting students' personal development. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory, for moral development very good, and for social and cultural development good. Comments in the previous inspection report have been noted and some limited progress made in developing the collective worship programme. However, this still falls far short of meeting the legal requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all students. There still remains a variety of practice across different subjects in planning for and responding to spiritual and cultural issues within the subject content and approaches to teaching.

38 The role of the whole curriculum in providing opportunities for spiritual development is still not fully considered and this continues to lead to inconsistencies and missed opportunities. Students do have opportunities to attend one act of collective worship per week based on an assembly programme which focuses on issues of spiritual and moral concern. Opportunity was well taken to use the Christian millennium as a basis for some reflection and for drawing up students' own millennium prayers which are displayed around the school. A Christian group meets weekly in the lunchtime to support the spiritual and faith development of those Christian students and teachers who attend.

39 Students' moral development is very well supported through the high moral values which permeate the life and work of the school. Students know what is right and wrong and what is expected of them. They are encouraged to think about the consequences of their actions on others and to be considerate towards them. Religious education and the personal, health and social education programme effectively provide a wide range of opportunities for students to address issues of moral and ethical concern. Other subjects also provide opportunities through aspects of their curriculum content, such as in history where discussion of topics such as Hitler's rise to power and the rise of the Nazi party in Germany are considered in detail. In geography in Key Stage 3 the study of population and the unequal distribution of resources using Brazil as a case study gives students time to consider the moral implications of these issues.

40 The social development of students is good and opportunities are given for students to relate positively to their peers, adults in the school, and the wider community. For example, various charities are supported and a senior citizens' Christmas party is organised and run by post-16 students. Relationships are very good and are based on mutual respect. Students are polite and friendly. They work co-operatively together as evidenced in group work in many lessons. Students with special educational needs are very positive about the way in which they are included in the life of the school. The school's ethos of inclusion and support for those students identified as having special educational needs has a positive impact on the social and moral development of those students as well as all other students in the school. The personal, social and health education and tutorial programme provide a firm basis for discussing issues of citizenship and wider social concern. Students take responsibility for themselves and others through, for example, the school council which encourages participation in the life of the school. Physical education makes an effective contribution to students' social development by encouraging them to consider issues of teamwork, fairness and justice within the setting of games such as football. Post-16 students are involved in a paired reading scheme with students on the school's register of special educational needs. This enhances the social experience and development of both older and younger students. The ethos of this scheme is improved by the fact that post-16 students receive formal training and support for this work.

41 Links with the community are good and benefit opportunities and facilities available to students. The partnership with Stafford College, which offers a programme of adult and community education, provides Wolgarston's post-16 students with a wider choice of Advanced Subsidiary level courses, such as psychology and law, and the opportunity to retake GCSE mathematics and English. Business links enable all Year 11 students to have the opportunity to participate in one week's work experience as well

as providing funding for items such as printing. The school's involvement in the wider community provides good opportunities for students' personal and social development through involvement in environmental projects such as the 'Best Kept Village' competition, in which students were involved in making presentations to the organisers. They have also been involved in recycling schemes which have in turn provided funding for the planting of trees on the school site.

42 The provision made for students to appreciate their own culture is good. For example, participation in school productions such as a recent production of *Joseph*, produced very strong leadership from the post-16 students. Trips, visits and field-work, at home and abroad, complement provision. However, the range of opportunities to explore the richness and diversity of other cultures is less well developed. In some subjects opportunities to explore a range of cultures are well taken. In sociology in Year 10, issues of ethnicity and culture are sensitively addressed in a unit dealing with educational achievement and effective use of sociological terminology and concepts to address stereotypes is made. In Advanced level physical education, there are excellent opportunities provided for students to develop their knowledge and understanding of sport in both ancient and contemporary multi-cultural settings. In religious education the link between religious belief and cultural practices is considered in such units as "Being a Muslim" in Year 9. However, there remain areas where the multi-cultural dimension is not sufficiently addressed. For example, in music in Year 9 there are many missed opportunities although in Key Stage 4 examination work it is more effectively supported. The very good textiles technology work shows no focus on any major international aspects and in food technology reference to foods from different cultures is not sufficiently developed. Displays around the school do not draw sufficiently on a range of cultural traditions.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

43 Students are well cared for within a good learning environment. They are well known and supported by their teachers and their progress and well-being are closely monitored. High expectations and encouragement lead to positive attitudes to work and good behaviour.

44 The assessment and monitoring of students' progress are effectively facilitated at whole-school level by systematic and thorough procedures. Good use is made of a wide range of performance data to establish benchmarks against which to judge achievement, and to set appropriately challenging targets for improvement in standards. The close links between the pastoral support by tutors, and academic monitoring by subject teachers and key stage leaders, are particularly effective in ensuring a complete overview of students' development both personally and academically.

45 Within the different subjects, however, assessment procedures vary in their effectiveness. Most subjects keep detailed records of students' work, but in many cases, practice is weakened by approaches being insufficiently rigorous and consistent. For instance, assessment is not always based on clear criteria which are shared with the students, and at Key Stage 3 insufficient use is made of National Curriculum levels on a routine basis to help students to know how well they are doing.

46 The annual review of statements of special educational needs draws upon consultation with a wide range of professional opinion, parents or carers, and the students themselves. This consultation provides for, and informs, the updating of records on a regular basis. The introduction of individual education plans has increased teachers' awareness of students' learning requirements but these are not yet sufficiently well developed to enable them to be used for setting targets for improvement.

47 The calm, purposeful and orderly school ethos together fosters good relationships and behaviour and strongly promotes the achievement of high standards. Students benefit from clear guidance and encouragement. For example, student handbooks provide very good guidance on personal organisation, behaviour and achievement. Rewards and sanctions are consistently applied and are well understood. Students value the recognition of their effort and recognise that the sanctions are applied fairly.

48 Students also benefit from the thorough procedures for monitoring and promoting good attendance and punctuality. These include close liaison with parents, the education welfare officer, and other outside agencies. Students are aware of the attendance levels being reached through, for example, the display of graphs showing comparative attendance levels by tutor groups. Computerised attendance records enable efficient analysis of attendance patterns to identify any concerns and parents are contacted in the event of any unexplained absences. The school is constantly seeking to improve attendance and is particularly targeting those parents who take their children on holiday during term time.

49 Health and safety issues are addressed effectively. The school has an appropriate health and safety policy and the headteacher is responsible for its implementation. There are regular inspections to check the safety of equipment and appliances. Practices of the evacuation procedures are conducted and properly recorded and risks are assessed both within departments and for the whole school. Provision for first aid is good. Ten members of the staff hold current first aid qualification and first aid supplies are readily accessible throughout the school. Accident records are very detailed and helpful in the identification of potential risks. The medical room provides good facilities for students needing treatment.

50 The school is vigilant and sensitive in the way in which it exercises its responsibilities for child protection. The use of the Staffordshire Area Child Protection Committee procedures ensures that requirements are fully met. The assistant headteacher, responsible for student services, co-ordinates child protection matters and has undertaken appropriate training, with further training planned to ensure compliance with current good practice. In addition, key stage leaders have undertaken child protection training. All staff and adults working in the school are aware of what to do in the case of any concerns. There are well-established liaison arrangements with outside agencies, including social services and the health authority who provide good support and advice for students.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

51 The school works in close partnership with parents seeking to involve them in the work and life of the school as much as possible. This partnership is reinforced by the pupil/home/school partnership and by very good communication about the life and work of the school, and regular information to parents on the progress being made by their children.

52 Most parents are pleased with the school and the education which it provides. Inspection evidence supports the positive views expressed by parents about the high levels of expectation, the good progress made by students and the good quality of the leadership and management. Inspection findings also support the view of parents that there is a need to provide greater consistency in the timing and amount of homework given. However, there was no evidence to support the views of a minority of parents that there are significant difficulties in the way the school works with parents, nor in the information it provides to parents about students' progress. The concerns of a few parents about standards of behaviour and the range of extra-curricular activities available are not fully supported. Behaviour is judged to be good overall with only a few instances of disruptive behaviour by a small minority of students in lessons. There is a good range of activities provided outside lessons which are well supported by students.

53 Parents are regularly informed about the progress of their children though written reports are sometimes insufficiently detailed in Year 9 and the information provided is not always sufficiently diagnostic. Written reports are supported by consultation evenings which almost nine out of ten parents attend and, where attendance is a problem, staff will seek to make alternative arrangements. Parents and carers are involved in the annual and transitional reviews of students with statements of special educational needs. This keeps them involved and informed as to their child's progress towards the

targets set out as part of the review process. A strength of the reporting process is the early notification to parents of both praise and matters of concern. Parents are always contacted, and usually respond very positively, when concerns are identified. Since the previous inspection the school has developed academic and community awards, which fully involve parents in the celebration of students' successes.

54 Information provided to parents about the life and work of the school is very good and, prior to students joining the school, parents are invited to attend an induction presentation evening, which is well attended. Information for parents clearly explains what is happening, how it links with students' work and how parents can be supportive by, for example, helping post-16 students to find the right balance between their studies, paid work and other activities. The recently introduced 'Wolgarston Monthly News' is a very good initiative to share news, celebrate success and seek feedback from parents.

55 Parents provide good support for students' learning at school and at home and in their wider activities. The Friends of Wolgarston School organise social events and other activities to raise funds to support the work of the school. For example, they organise discos in conjunction with the local cricket club and produce a calendar supported by local businesses who pay for advertising space. They also run fund raising events in conjunction with departments, to meet specific needs such as a quiz to support the purchase of science equipment and events to improve post-16 facilities. Recently, the Friends have bought a complete set of chairs for the hall. The support of parents is much appreciated by students and staff, and makes a positive contribution to resources and facilities available to students and to their learning.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

56 The quality of leadership and management is good. The positive impact of leadership by the headteacher, the deputy head and the governing body was recognised in the last inspection. The headteacher provides clear direction for the school and, supported by the leadership group and the governing body, has responded effectively to the increasing pace of change over the last two years, which has ensured good progress has been made since the last inspection.

57 The governing body's overall response to the key issues in the last inspection report was systematic and thorough in all areas except that surrounding religious education and provision of a daily act of collective worship. The quality of teaching has improved markedly since the last inspection; the proportion of teaching which is less than satisfactory has fallen from around 20 per cent to five per cent. This is a significant improvement as is that for very good teaching which was identified previously as occurring in only a small number of lessons. Very good and excellent teaching is now found in around 20 per cent of lessons. The recently quickened pace of improvement is well identified in the recent improvements in GCSE and GCE examination results and was confirmed by observation during the inspection. Overall academic standards have improved in line with the national trend since the last inspection. The school is popular with parents. The inspection survey of parents' opinions indicated strong satisfaction with the school in the key areas of leadership and progress made by students. All parental comments about the particularly clear leadership style and visibility of the headteacher were very positive. The accuracy of these judgements was confirmed by the inspection.

58 The school has a set of clearly expressed and appropriate aims that are widely understood, shared and put into practice. Parents share in these values and particularly appreciate how the school ensures its students leave as mature and responsible young people. This characterises the way that the governing body and the staff of the school demonstrate a strong commitment to inclusion and equality of opportunity for all, with it permeating the workings of the school, rather than being part of a stridently proclaimed mission statement. This is evident in the improving quality of provision made for students with special educational needs. Development of strategies to meet the needs of talented and gifted students has been slowed by the fact that an assistant headteacher has had to take on responsibility for

this area as well as being the acting special educational needs co-ordinator. Despite limited specialist knowledge he has ably and effectively progressed provision for students with special educational needs. The quality of procedures for care and guidance and the students' attitudes and behaviour, described elsewhere in this report, demonstrate an ethos which is consistent with the actions and words of senior managers.

59 Following the last inspection, the headteacher ensured that improving the quality of teaching and learning was at the centre of all that the school was doing, through its school development plan. Staff were consulted and accepted this as the way forward. The leadership group, consisting of the headteacher, deputy head and three assistant headteachers carried out thorough reviews of the quality of teaching in each curriculum area, and recently monitoring practices have been effectively moderated and some senior managers below the leadership group have been involved. Preparation for the introduction of performance management in 2001 has led to curriculum team leaders, the school's middle managers, being given a more systematic role in monitoring and review. There remains, however, greater scope for further involvement of middle managers in whole school issues. Managers at all levels provide loyal and usually effective support for the headteacher and are keen to have a greater role in school self-evaluation and more focused monitoring within their own curriculum areas.

60 The work of the governing body is well structured to enable it to fulfil its responsibilities. The governing body has a strong and experienced leadership team reflected through the chairs of its committees and the chair of governors himself. Governors have a good understanding of their roles and even several of the governors new to this governing body have extensive experience on the governing bodies of partner schools. The governing body is very supportive of the school and identifies closely with its aims. The governors are very active in finding ways to make best use of the school's accommodation and resources for both its students and students and for the wider community as well as being lead players in financial planning and the monitoring of expenditure. They have the knowledge to take a clearer role as the school's critical friend and to ask challenging questions of all the staff given the opportunity to make presentations to the whole governing body or its committees. The governing body is fully conversant with the school's strengths and weaknesses but most governors have found it difficult to challenge school management to explain how it will deal with its weaknesses. The governing body is now ready to do this. The first stages of this have been the increased involvement of governors in target setting processes, scrutinising and approving the school's performance management policy and in seeking information on the code of practice related to this policy. The governing body has played an appropriate role in ensuring that the school has realistic but challenging targets.

61 The governing body fully meets all its statutory responsibilities except that it has yet to ensure that sufficient time is allocated to religious education in Key Stage 4 and post-16 to deliver the locally Agreed Syllabus and that the school provides a daily act of collective worship for all students. Shortfalls in electronic equipment for music prevent the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum in music being met.

62 The leadership shown by those in middle management is good overall, and sometimes very good, though there are variations, for example, in music where sickness has resulted in unsatisfactory provision, and where there are deficiencies in aspects of management. These deficiencies tend to relate to whole-school strategic planning not focusing yet on that aspect of the curriculum sufficiently or as a high enough priority. The school has not yet secured the services of a specialist religious education teacher. There are comparable but less acute difficulties in the provision for information and communication technology. Progress in these two areas has not been sufficient to ensure satisfactory standards in information and communication technology by the end of Key Stage 3 and for religious education by the end of Key Stage 4, even though weaknesses in these areas were identified in the previous inspection report. On the other hand the school's focused attention through its effective self-

review process on modern foreign languages in particular, and to a lesser extent on design and technology, has resulted in significant progress in these areas since the last inspection.

63 There is a good match between the expertise of the staff and the requirements of the curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4 in all areas except music, where presently it is poor, and in religious education. Staff expertise is very good in some areas both for these key stages and post-16. Occasionally staff need further subject or curriculum professional development to meet the challenges of post-16 provision and the school has an appropriate in-service training system to support this. The weakness in music due to extended staff absence reflects insufficient attention being paid to how curriculum provision can be affected by unexpected occurrences. Similarly, temporary responsibilities that are extended for a year or more, require urgent resolution. The school has very good arrangements for the induction of new staff and is ideally placed to be a very effective provider of initial teacher training. The provision of learning resources – books, materials and equipment – is satisfactory, though there is a lack of information technology equipment for music and books and equipment in science. The school buildings provide satisfactory accommodation for the requirements of the curriculum overall and there are plans in place to meet the unsatisfactory aspects of provision for design and technology. The range of accommodation for physical education is excellent.

64 Overall the school is well placed, given the good quality of its senior and middle managers as a team, to implement performance management effectively and take the school forward at the increased rate of progress clearly established over the last two years. There is a good system for monitoring teaching and giving guidance for targeted improvement. The school has an effectively established line management system in all areas except the performing arts. There are regular meetings involving members of the leadership group, appropriate senior managers and curriculum leaders to monitor, discuss and support their management role. The comparable guidance structure with particularly, highly effective post-16 and Key Stage 4 leaders, is equally thorough and systematic. The school development plan identifies the need for current and “live” job descriptions for all staff and this will be completed in line with any review of senior management and the leadership team to ensure the best possible deployment of the staff involved to maintain the school’s present rate of improvement.

65 The school’s priorities, as expressed in the school development plan, are appropriate and the plan provides a useful agenda for action. The plan sets out well how the school is moving towards improved target setting at whole-school and subject level. There are already examples of good practice at both levels and these can be disseminated, notably from English and the social sciences. The school also produces a wealth of assessment data on students that is well used to set whole school targets and is being increasingly used to set targets for individual students. At all levels there is satisfactory use of resources but it is only in recent planning that the school has begun to focus on seeking major resource inputs from grants such as that which could come from specialist college status.

66 Financial planning and monitoring, in both of which the governors play an active role, are very good. The allocation of resources is properly related to priorities in the school development plan. The school has good regard to the principles of best value, for example, by comparing the costs of different suppliers, considering the appropriateness of different types of expenditure and comparing its costs with those of other schools locally and in other parts of the country. Specific grants, such as funding from the National Grid for Learning used to purchase new computers, are appropriately used. The sixth form is viable, in that the income that it generates covers its costs. Until April 2001 learning support assistants are directly funded. They are dedicated, enthusiastic and appropriately qualified and they have a positive impact on progress in working with students identified as having special educational needs. Requirements of statements for students with special educational needs are fully met. Financial controls are firm and well-directed, as demonstrated in the recent annual audits of the school accounts. The school administration is smooth, unobtrusive with very friendly personnel.

67 In summary, this is a good school that provides good value for money. This judgement is based principally upon the good quality of teaching, the above average attainment of the students, and their good achievement in relation to their prior attainment, the good ethos of the school and the effective use that it makes of the resources at its disposal.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

**** Continue to raise academic standards by:**

developing further the use of individual student level target setting (paragraphs 65, 96 and 150);

making more effective and consistent use of marking and homework, particularly at Key Stage 3 (paragraphs 22, 52, 105 and 182).

**** Continue to strengthen the quality of teaching by ensuring greater consistency in:**

teachers' expectations of the standards to be achieved (paragraphs 21, 113 and 162);

challenge in the teaching (paragraphs 19, 20, 94, 125 and 135);

the opportunities for students to take greater initiative and responsibility for their learning (paragraphs 9, 97 and 135);

planning to ensure that students' interest is sustained through well-timed and paced learning activities (paragraph 20);

behaviour management (paragraphs 21 and 95);

providing for the more effective sharing of good practice (paragraph 65).

**** Improve the provision for information and communication technology, music and religious education by:**

purchasing the necessary equipment to deliver the National Curriculum in music (paragraph 164);

increasing the time allocated to information and communication technology at Key Stage 3 and for religious education at Key Stage 4 and post-16 (paragraphs 6, 25 – 27, 36, 61, 139, 144, 175, 176 and 184);

improving the curriculum information available to supply teachers at Key Stage 3 for music (paragraphs 17 and 162).

**** Improve the involvement of middle managers by:**

involving all subject leaders systematically in lesson observations (paragraphs 59, 77, 113, 127, 137 and 144);

minimising the use of long-term temporary appointments with management responsibilities (paragraphs 57, 63 and 137);

completing the up-dating of all job descriptions (paragraph 64).

In addition to the issues listed above, the governing body should also consider the following:

the statutory requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship for all students (paragraphs 37 and 61).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	134
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	60

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3	18	46	28	4	1	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	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	598	183
Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals	37	N/A

Special educational needs	Y9 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	21	0
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	65	0

English as an additional language	No. of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	0

Student mobility in the last school year	No. of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	14
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	18

Attendance

Authorised absence

	per cent
School data	7.5
National comparative data	5.9

Unauthorised absence

	per cent
School data	0.7
National comparative data	0.4

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	98	114	212

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	63	80	77
	Girls	94	89	84
	Total	157	169	161
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	74 (77)	80 (79)	76 (72)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	31 (41)	57 (53)	41 (28)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	62	72	67
	Girls	92	94	84
	Total	154	166	151
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	73 (74)	78 (86)	71 (77)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	46 (43)	44 (50)	44 (29)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	105	89	194

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	61	100	101
	Girls	59	87	87
	Total	120	187	188
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	62 (54)	96 (98)	97 (100)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	43.6 (40.2)
	National	38.4 (38.0)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	per cent success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	0	N/A
	National		N/A

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	36	37	73

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	18.48	22.17	20.2 (17.7)	0	0	0.0 (0.3)
National	17.7	18.6	18.2 (17.9)	2.6	2.9	2.7 (2.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	per cent success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	4	73
	National		N/A

International Baccalaureate		Number	per cent success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those students who achieved all they studied	School	0	N/A
	National		76.5

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	777
Any other minority ethnic group	4

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	3	
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: Y9 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	49.8
Number of students per qualified teacher	15.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y9 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	12.0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	263

Deployment of teachers: Y9– Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74
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Average teaching group size: Y[] – Y[]

Key Stage 3	23.8
Key Stage 4	21.6

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	2069590
Total expenditure	2093870
Expenditure per student	2681
Balance brought forward from previous year	28277
Balance carried forward to next year	3997

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	775
Number of questionnaires returned	312

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	5	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	47	48	3	2	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	28	53	11	2	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	27	52	14	5	3
The teaching is good.	32	57	4	2	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	29	53	13	3	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	51	41	4	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	63	32	4	1	0
The school works closely with parents.	28	53	13	3	4
The school is well led and managed.	39	52	2	1	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	40	52	3	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	19	50	12	4	14

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

ENGLISH

68 The majority of students come into the school with attainment levels that are above the national average. This is borne out through looking at students' work and through discussion with students and teachers. The results of the 2000 end of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests were above the national average, although the number of students attaining level 6 or above was below that of similar schools. Taking the four years 1997-2000 together the performance of students in English was above the national average. The performance of boys over that time span was also above the national average while that of girls was well above the national average. At the end of Key Stage 4, the GCSE results in English in 2000 were well above the national average for attainment at grades A* to C, and in line with the national average in English literature. Work seen during the inspection confirmed the judgement that at the end of Key Stage 4 standards are well above the national average. All students entered for GCE Advanced Level in 2000 passed the examination, with 51 per cent achieving A and B grades, which is above the national average.

69 Analysis of students' work, and observation in lessons, shows that by the end of Key Stage 3 students make satisfactory progress. The majority of students can write fairly extended pieces with largely accurate spelling, punctuation and grammar – literacy skills are generally good. They can express themselves orally with a fair level of confidence. All students respond well to literary texts. They can analyse character and themes and comment on the writer's intentions confidently, with higher attaining students showing quite sophisticated insights. All students can discuss techniques of literary analysis showing how writers create particular effects, and why: this is a particular strength. Students who have special educational needs make good progress in their reading and writing skills.

70 Students make good progress during Key Stage 4, and by the end of the key stage they can respond sensitively to literary texts. They show an awareness of the language of literary analysis, and higher attaining students write extended, accurate pieces, showing understanding of plot development, themes and imagery. Middle and lower attaining students, too, show these insights, in a less developed fashion. Higher attaining students are able to write extended pieces showing a good level of technical accuracy and an awareness of the reader. Middle and lower attaining students have these skills to a lesser degree. Listening skills are well developed, with all students listening carefully to one another and the teacher, and they are able to ask pertinent, relevant questions. Students with special educational needs make progress in line with the rest of the students.

71 Advanced level students make good progress during their courses, in particular in skills of literary analysis. This is seen through their sustained writing and in discussion. They often show perceptive, mature insights, and they can employ appropriate terms to describe and explain a writer's intentions. Their essay writing is detailed and largely accurate. Very able Advanced level students make progress commensurate with their abilities.

72 It was not possible to observe any work in GCSE drama during the inspection. In 2000, 13 students were entered for drama GCSE. Seventy-seven per cent attained a grade C or better, which is better than the national average.

73 Teaching ranges from satisfactory to very good, and is good overall at both key stages and post-16. Strengths in teaching include subject teachers' very good specialist knowledge, their high expectations of what students can do and lesson planning. Where teaching is good, students make good progress in lessons. In one Year 10 lesson seen during the inspection, for example, the teacher was introducing students to characters and themes in Willy Russell's *Educating Rita*. The teacher's enthusiasm for the play, specialist knowledge and his high expectations of what students could achieve, all contributed to the students making very good gains in understanding significant aspects of the play. Students could, however, achieve even more in some lessons if there was less emphasis on teachers talking to the class and more opportunities for students to explore ideas in groups, take part in role-play, or be involved in more active ways of learning. This is particularly the case in Years 12 and 13.

74 The vast majority of students have positive attitudes to learning, and in a significant number of lessons observed, students' attitudes played an important part in good progress taking place. In most lessons seen, students' behaviour was good. They listen well, both to one another and the teacher, are attentive and generally keep on task well. Students' competence in the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are well developed overall, throughout the school in other subjects, as described in the first section of this commentary (How High Are The Standards). All these have significant impact on learning. Room for greater risk taking in some oral work has been noted, particularly in history and modern languages.

75 The department makes a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, often through the study of literature. Particularly good work was seen during the inspection in looking at poetry. In one assignment, for example, students were comparing Tennyson's *The Charge of the Light Brigade* with Owen's *Dulce et Decorum Est*. Students wrote with real sensitivity and feeling about the situations described in the poems. Work on multi-cultural literary texts is currently under-developed.

76 The department has good procedures for assessing students' work. In Key Stage 4, students know how they are doing, what their GCSE targets are, and what they need to do in order to improve. Similarly, post-16 students' work is assessed against Advanced Subsidiary and Advanced level criteria. Although Year 9 students' work is helpfully marked, as yet students are not told the National Curriculum level at which they are working or specifically what they need to do in order to work at a higher level.

77 The head of the curriculum area provides good leadership and management. The department works well together as a team, and new teachers coming into the department are well supported. Although monitoring of lessons takes place, particularly by members of the leadership team, there is not yet systematic observation and monitoring of lessons in place by the head of the curriculum area and his deputy. The use and analysis of performance data is a developing strength. The English schemes of work meet the current requirements to include information and curriculum technology, although the use of the Internet for research purposes is not yet built into the Key Stage 4 curriculum.

78 The English department has made good progress since the last inspection. Standards have risen, in particular strategies have been developed for raising achievement at the C/D borderline at GCSE. Liaison between the department and the local middle schools has developed well, and work on making the progression from Year 8 to Year 9 as smooth as possible has been effective. The department has maintained its previously good levels of teaching, and there is no longer any question about teachers having high enough expectations of what their students can do. There has been a review of the department's approach to teaching students with special educational needs, and provision is now good. The development of the Year 9 literacy programme was spearheaded by the English department and makes a good contribution to the development of students' literacy. The English department has a reflective approach to its practice and is well placed to develop even further.

MATHEMATICS

79 Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 using average National Curriculum levels are well above the national average and well above the average for similar schools. The number of students with National Curriculum level 5 or higher is well above the national average and above the average for similar schools. Inspection evidence indicates that standards are above the national average. High attainers use mathematical language such as 'inverse sine' and 'discontinuity' appropriately and with understanding. They draw neat accurate graphs and solve equations such as $\sin 43 = 10/a$ with ease. Average attainers know their tables and can use negative numbers correctly. Their basic algebra is improving as a result of improved understanding through the good teaching they receive. Low attainers are consolidating earlier work, on co-ordinates and the measurement of time, for example, working largely at National Curriculum Level 4. Achievement is good through this key stage. The trend is above the national trend. A significant minority of students reach National Curriculum level 8.

80 Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 for students with grades A* to C are well above the average for all maintained schools. Standards based on average point scores are above the national average and above the average for similar schools. Inspection evidence indicates that standards are above the national average. Boys' achievement is higher than that for girls at GCSE but there was no significant difference found among current Key Stage 4 students. Low attaining students follow a graduated course which is appropriate for them. The number of students earning a grade at GCSE is above the national average. The high attainers are preparing for entry in both mathematics and statistics, broadening the curriculum appropriately. The development of their spatial awareness is enhanced through the good teaching of three-dimensional trigonometry. The very good learning observed is partly due to the excellent attitudes of the students to their lessons. Achievement is good through this key stage. Students with special educational need make good progress through both key stages.

81 Standards at the end of Year 13 for students with the higher grades A/B at GCE Advanced Level are above the national average. This standard is confirmed by the inspection evidence. Year 12 students are developing confidence in the process of differentiation. Negative index work is a current focus in their learning. Year 13 students have a deeper understanding partly as a result of using the 'omnigraph' programme on the school's computers for drawing graphs. This is a good feature in the department's work which could be developed further. Achievement post-16 is good. One student earned a grade A at GCE Advanced level in further mathematics, a very high standard in the subject. Gifted and talented students make good progress through the school. Standards have improved since the last inspection.

82 The attitudes of students to the subject are good overall. In a minority of lessons behaviour is satisfactory as some students require firm direction in the teaching before learning can begin. Generally this is not the case. In many lessons the attitudes are very good, as in a Year 9 lesson where students listen well and contribute to the lesson appropriately. They work co-operatively in pairs. Post-16 students have developed good standards of independent learning, taking responsibility, for example, for how many routine questions they need to complete before skills are secure. They enjoy the opportunities for discussion that arise in some lessons.

83 The teaching is good in each key stage. Approximately two-thirds of the teaching is good and approximately one-sixth of the teaching is either very good or satisfactory. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. The strength of the teaching is in the teachers' very good knowledge of their subject. The weakness is in the methods of teaching.

84 Very good teacher's knowledge was responsible for the very good learning in a Year 10 lesson on multiplying factors. The work set was an appropriate challenge to students and the very good planning moved the lesson along at a good pace. The use of notebooks is good practice as they help students to revise later on. The weakness was the lack of discussion on the relevance of multiplying factors, and the inverse process.

85 The lack of general discussion is a feature of many lessons which are otherwise good. The nature of the work in class is directed in accordance with the planning. This sometimes limits the wider understanding of the subject as the approach is too narrowly focused on a short-term goal. Mental work is not well developed. The outcomes are missed opportunities such as interesting alternatives in the division of a number by five, more time to understand the meaning of words such as 'at least' and 'no

more', the introduction of surds, the intersection or otherwise of two lines in three dimensional space and the use of alternative solutions to problems. Visual aids are sometimes missing from the planning and the use of computers is not yet fully developed.

86 The demands made on students in the interaction between post-16 students and their teacher were the basis of good teaching in one class. The work set is a good challenge to these students as they are obliged to verbalise their answers which in turn clarifies their thinking and enhances their knowledge and understanding. A good challenging problem at the end of the lesson related well to the earlier work in the lesson and to work in physics. The good teaching is responsible for the good standards of learning throughout the school.

87 The leadership and management are good. Both teaching and learning have improved since the last inspection. Subject performance is monitored well. Procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are good and good use is made of these assessments to monitor progress and identify areas for further teacher intervention. The teachers have a shared commitment to improve. This is clear from the improvement since the last inspection and the rise in attainment levels above national trends. The department is a good one.

SCIENCE

88 The attainment of pupils when they join the school is above average. By the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 student attainment was well above average, boys and girls performing very similarly. Attainment is in line with that in schools of a similar type. There has been a rising trend in attainment in science. In 2000 attainment was well above average compared to all schools, boys performing marginally better than girls. Attainment was just below that in mathematics but in line with that for English, when compared with the averages for similar schools.

89 At Key Stage 4 in 1999 the number of students gaining A* to C was broadly in line with all schools nationally. Boys' attainment was higher in science than in other subjects in the school and higher than that nationally for boys. Girls' attainment was lower in science than in other subjects in the school and below that achieved nationally for girls. This difference was not evident in the work seen during the inspection. Overall science attainment is higher than that in mathematics but lower than in English. In 2000 there was a significant rise in attainment, results A* to C being very high compared to national figures and above average for similar schools. Achievement at the end of Key Stage 3 is satisfactory as compared with that on entry and so is that at the end of Key Stage 4 compared to that at the beginning of the key stage.

90 At Advanced level, biology is performing marginally below national percentages at each grade but progress is just in line with predicted results for the school. Results in chemistry are above national percentages for each grade. Results are higher than that predicted from GCSE results. Physics results match very closely to national percentages at each grade and results are also above those predicted from GCSE grades. Progress in Years 12 and 13 is good.

91 During the inspection, work seen in students' books at Key Stage 3 was of above average quality. Discussion with students about physical processes showed they could describe series and parallel circuits but not the effects of bulb removal in multiple bulb circuits, showing attainment below average at level 4. In life processes and living things students understood the principles of breeding, selective breeding and inbreeding typically showing level 5 attainment or better. In materials and their properties, students could explain the principles of separation and that a chemical reaction takes place when copper oxide and sulphuric acid are mixed - confirming level 5 attainment.

92 Students achieve well at Key Stage 4 when compared with the standards they achieved at the beginning of Key Stage 4. Students' books contained work of a very good standard. In discussion, students showed a grasp of scientific terminology, such as the names of the parts of the eye. However, students found it more difficult to explain how these parts carried out their function, suggesting below average attainment at this point in time. Students could readily work out chemical and structural

formulae for hydrocarbons but then queried why water was not included in a list of liquid hydrocarbons, revealing an insecure grasp of some fundamental principles. Able students showed a good understanding of practical aspects of investigatory science and a grasp of scientific principles related to Hooke's Law.

93 Post-16 students have comprehensive and well-organised notes. Year 13 students, potentially A or B grade physicists, showed a good understanding of hadrons, mesons and baryon numbers. Chemistry students demonstrated considerable skill in the naming of alcohols and more complex molecules showing, again, a high standard of learning and attainment. Biology students showed an ability to understand the details of the control of breathing in humans - showing attainment of at least C grade or better.

94 Throughout Key Stage 3 all teaching was satisfactory. At Key Stage 4, 83 per cent of teaching was good with only one unsatisfactory lesson being seen. Post-16, 57 per cent of teaching was satisfactory, 28 per cent good and 14 per cent very good. Where teaching was good, work had been well planned and appropriate teaching materials were available. Lessons started with good use of question and answer techniques to encourage students to recall or remind them of earlier work and set the scene for the lesson. The aims of the lesson and its intended progression were outlined and pace was maintained throughout. Good use was made of demonstrations to show students how to set up apparatus and identify pitfalls. The progression of concept development in the lesson was logical and thought had been given to providing materials at a range of levels. Good work was observed from teachers supporting students with special educational needs. Where teaching had some weaknesses, the lessons started with too little introduction or the teacher made extended delivery to the class. Insufficient thought had been given to class management and room layout and students found difficulty accessing materials and power points. In some lessons the conceptual thread of the lesson became dislocated thus making it difficult for students to grasp the main point of the lesson. In other cases the pace of the lesson was not maintained and there was need for greater challenge.

95 The attitudes of students to their work overall was good but there were instances of less than satisfactory work and co-operation from a minority of students, most noticeably boys in Year 10.

96 This is a good department that is being managed well. The new head of department, supported by existing colleagues, had made good progress since her appointment at the start of the year. Absence has slowed progress but there are good prospects for the future. All schemes of work are in place and are used very much as working documents. Although monitoring of lessons takes place, particularly by members of the leadership team, there is not yet systematic observation and monitoring of lessons in place by the head of science and the heads of separate subject areas. This would help secure more frequent monitoring and ensure, for example, that marking is consistent across the department and that the use of supportive, target-based comments is increased. The department is developing a very good database on students and its use should be extended further, developing the monitoring and target setting aspects. Good use is made of information and communication technology in researching information and display but insufficient use is made for data-logging and analysis. Whilst there are no written literacy or numeracy policies the department makes good contributions to developing numerical skills and makes use of key words in science to develop scientific literacy. The use of a science tutor is contributing to improved standards of work. The identification of and strategies for teaching gifted and talented students are still to be fully developed. Whilst the department is well resourced with good facilities, there are insufficient appropriate textbooks for GCSE students and a lack of specialist physics equipment for Advanced level students. The technical support for the department is good but the provision for storage of chemicals is inconvenient and inadequate.

97 Since the last inspection, progress has been good. The following have all improved; facilities, standards, assessment, visual display and identification of learning outcomes in schemes of work. There is still opportunity to develop; materials for the full range of ability being taught, strategies to ensure students securely grasp fundamental concepts, more stimulating approaches to teaching, strategies to develop skills of independent learning and initiative in students, and wider use of information and communication technology.

ART

98 The proportion of students gaining grades A* to C in GCSE examinations is above the national average. Since the last inspection, the trend in results has been rising, with well-qualified and committed staff delivering good teaching. Boys and girls perform well in comparison to attainment in most other subjects in the school. In 2000, the Advanced level results were very good with almost half the students achieving grade A.

99 At Key Stage 3, standards observed during the inspection are in line with national expectations for students of the same age nationally. Students achieve well at Key Stage 4 when compared with the standards they achieved at the beginning of Key Stage 4, and by the end of Year 13, students are confident in a range of media, using both traditional and more original techniques. At the end of Key Stage 3, students are able to use line, tone and texture effectively in their drawings. They observe natural forms well and understand three-dimensional concepts. At Key Stage 4 students are able to develop and sustain a chosen theme in their work, and can investigate and explain their use of a range of visual and other sources in order to do so.

100 Students with special educational needs respond positively to the subject at both key stages. They benefit from individual attention so that they make good progress and sometimes show higher attainment than might be expected of them.

101 Students' progress in Key Stage 3 is sound and achievement is in line with expected levels at the end of Year 9. Students' knowledge and understanding are strengthened through class discussion and research of art from the present and past and from other cultures. Sketchbooks are used effectively and since the last inspection the work is now more flexible regarding scale and range. The students explore ideas through much of their drawing, painting and design work and there are some good examples of expressive mixed media.

102 In Key Stage 4 students experiment well and make successful expressive observational drawings and paintings. They demonstrate personal interests, ideas and responses to their own and other cultures through the work they make. Good use is made of combining observation with a range of secondary sources and they often show the influence of different cultures, including African, North American and Japanese art, important movements in art, or particular artists.

103 Post-16 students make very good progress: confidence with tools and materials enables individuals to tackle compositions in creative ways. They experiment confidently in a variety of media and the standard of personal studies and sketchbook work is very good.

104 Students enjoy their art lessons and apply themselves purposefully to their projects. Attitudes and behaviour throughout the department are always satisfactory, good in Key Stage 4 and very good post-16. This is a direct result of the high expectations and enthusiasm that teachers bring to their work and the high standards they set. Students are well motivated and respectful to adults and each other. Lessons are orderly and characterised by good relationships. The teachers establish an effective working ethos in which students are expected to behave and do their best. Post-16 students speak confidently about their work and demonstrate good knowledge and understanding.

105 The quality of teaching overall is good and makes a positive contribution to the standards achieved. Teachers have very good levels of subject expertise and use their own media skills to demonstrate techniques to the students. This is a strength of teaching. For example, in a Year 9 lesson on painting, the teacher used his expertise to demonstrate and challenge students to improve. Careful, clear explanations and good intervention at key points in students' learning enable students to make good progress. In the majority of lessons time is set aside to ensure that all students know and

understand what they are expected to learn, both in lessons and for homework, which is set and marked regularly. In a Year 12 lesson on portraits students were developing ideas from direct observation, making personal choices and incorporating a variety of media skills. They were confident and demonstrated very good knowledge and understanding of the connections made with artists' styles, which had influenced their work. Teachers plan and introduce lessons effectively and pace them well, finishing with an assessment of the students' progress through the lesson. The use of homework, to plan and extend work, in all key stages is well-integrated into lessons. Post-16 students are challenged to research and develop their work using a wide range of artistic influences. This was observed in a Year 13 lesson where students were planning their research for the mock examination starting points.

106 The subject is well led and managed. Teaching schemes and departmental policies are clear, comprehensive and provide very good guidance for teachers. Since the last inspection there is now greater choice in practical activities and the post-16 course is more structured. Both members of the team are well informed through formal and informal meetings and contribute to creating a successful department. The lead teacher for art monitors the work of the department through classroom observations and work sampling. Assessment procedures across all key stages are effective and inform curriculum planning adequately. There is no access to computers within the department, further accommodation has to be booked. Information and communication technology has not yet been developed sufficiently. The teaching of clay work would benefit from technical support and improvement of storage and preparation space which are still inadequate. Continued visits to museums and galleries will improve students' awareness and help raise their attainment.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

107 The standards in the GCSE courses in design and technology have improved steadily since the last inspection with a significant rise in the number of students gaining higher grades in the last year. In the Year 2000, the GCSE results were well above national average with seven out of every ten students gaining grades A* to C compared with around a half of students nationally. Most students achieved at least as well in design and technology compared with their other GCSE courses, with those taking food and textiles performing considerably better. About 80 per cent of students gained passes in GCE Advanced level in design and technology, which was broadly in line with the national average.

108 During Year 9, students make sufficiently good progress in the different course areas to reach standards in line with national average at the end of the key stage. Those standards are reflected in systems and control where students show a good understanding of the process of manufacturing a printed circuit board and a reasonable independence in making activities. Satisfactory skill levels were evident in a Year 9 lesson where students were soldering and assembling a model traffic light. Those taking textiles technology can work through a simple design and make process, and demonstrate fairly accurate hand sewing and machining skills that enables them to produce worthwhile products. In one lesson, students with special educational needs made good progress in developing their skills and confidence using textiles because of the positive and unobtrusive support they received. Students also establish similarly secure knowledge and skills in the other areas of food, graphics and resistant materials such as timber. Achievement over the whole of Key Stage 3 is satisfactory.

109 In work seen, overall standards in Key Stage 4 are above the national average and in some of the GCSE courses such as textiles technology and systems and control, are well above average. In project work, textiles students' wide and thorough research leads to clear design specifications and carefully documented product development. Students taking the food option also plan and research well with the higher attaining students developing more ambitious food products, often using multi-cultural themes. Students taking graphics demonstrate strengths in drawing skills and the presentation of design ideas, with the higher attaining students showing better annotation and evaluation. Systems and

control students use information and communication technology effectively to present their design ideas with the higher attaining students producing more sophisticated solutions because of a better scientific understanding. Standards in resistant materials are less strong, with students showing less well-organised project work and variable accuracy in cutting and joining mainly timber products. As most students taking the resistant materials option at GCSE are boys, there is an overall relatively lower performance by boys in design and technology as compared to their performance in other subjects at GCSE.

110 Overall achievement in Key Stage 4 is good with most students making considerable gains in their design and practical skills, often enhanced by the effective use of information and communication technology. As a result, most students now reach, and in some cases exceed, similar attainment levels to those they achieve in other GCSE subjects.

111 Standards in post-16 courses are in line with the national average with Year 12 students showing particular strengths in product analysis.

112 Students' response to design and technology has improved substantially since the last inspection and almost all lessons are characterised by interested and involved students who learn well and take care in producing worthwhile outcomes. This improved response is further reflected in the increasing numbers taking design and technology post-16.

113 Teaching is strong in almost all areas of the subject and reflects an improvement since the last inspection. While there is some unsatisfactory practice in resistant materials, this is more than balanced by the very good teaching in 40 per cent of lessons. All design and technology teachers are committed and knowledgeable and plan their lessons thoroughly. The best lessons have challenge and pace, reflecting the teacher's enthusiasm, very good class management skills and an awareness of the needs of different students including those with special educational needs. As a result students work with interest and make very good progress in developing their knowledge and skills. Students refer to the high expectations design and technology teachers have about homework, use of information and communication technology, and high standards of folder work, most respond positively. The need to stagger practical work in the very large GCSE food groups detracts from the otherwise good teaching and slows the students' acquisition of practical skills, even though it does not greatly detract from the successful examination results. The unsatisfactory teaching in resistant materials largely results from insufficiently high expectations, as well as a lack of confident and effective class management skills leading to a lack of pace and focus in students' learning. Although monitoring of lessons takes place, particularly by members of the leadership team, there is not yet systematic observation and monitoring of lessons in place by the head of faculty.

114 The National Curriculum requirements are met and the range of GCSE and post-16 courses makes a valuable contribution to school provision. The school runs a GCSE option in food that is not an approved design and technology course, and could confidently move towards an approved course.

115 Effective leadership has resulted in the above improvements and the school has been supportive in funding developments including plans to refurbish the unsatisfactory and unattractive resistant materials teaching area. The accommodation is otherwise sufficient though the large practical groups in Key Stage 4 result in less satisfactory split activities in the food area. The teachers work well together as a team though the separate funding of the two original subject areas, now covered by design and technology, works against the coherent management and development of a faculty.

GEOGRAPHY

116 This is a very effective subject. Students' attainment towards the end of Key Stage 3 is high, and direct observation of students' work supports the school's teacher assessments. Standards attained by the vast majority of students at the end of Key Stage 3 are well above those expected nationally.

117 GCSE results are well above average when compared to similar schools, and have been for the

last four years, although in 2000 they fell slightly. Standards of work seen in Year 10 lessons suggests that this very high attainment is continuing. The overall standard achieved by students at the end of Key Stage 4 is very good and for higher attaining students it is excellent. However, there is a small but significant group of middle and lower attaining students who under-achieve.

118 Standards attained by post-16 students are well above the averages for similar schools for Advanced level at all grades and have been for the last four years. Work seen in the current Year 13 shows that standards are well above those expected nationally.

119 All students make good progress in Key Stage 3 and very good progress in Key Stage 4. Achievement of the majority of post-16 students is good. Most have a good knowledge and understanding of geographic processes and patterns and of environment themes. For instance, in a Year 9 class, students are already using appropriate geographic terms and have a good understanding of processes such as coastal erosion and deposition. The vast majority of Key Stage 4 students and post-16 students are able to interpret geographic information and make reasoned judgements. This was well shown in a Year 12 lesson on urban re-generation, where students were searching for information in secondary sources and making reasoned evaluations.

120 Students with special education needs and higher attaining students make equally good progress as a result of a skilful match of classroom tasks to the needs of individual students. This is well shown in a Year 9 lesson on coasts where excellent progress was made as a result of the teacher's skilful use of video to illustrate and extend students' understanding of how cliffs are eroded.

121 In nearly all lessons, excellent relationships and behaviour, fostered by enthusiastic and stimulating teaching, contribute strongly to the positive attitude to learning. The vast majority of students respond well. They are eager, enthusiastic learners who readily engage in productive group and pair work, helping each other to search for information and solve problems. However, a small minority of students, especially in Year 9, have a low listening span and lose interest if teacher exposition is over long. They are sometimes too ready to spend time on low level tasks and need prompting to move onto more challenging activities such as interpreting information and offering explanations.

122 Teaching overall is very good. All teaching is satisfactory or better and three-quarters of all lessons are very good or excellent. Teaching is most effective at Advanced level. In the overwhelming majority of lessons the very good subject knowledge of teachers is skilfully transmitted to students through lively teacher exposition. It is invariably clear, stimulating and authoritative, drawing on many topical examples to illustrate and bring to life geographic themes. In a small minority of lessons, however, progress is slowed by over long teacher talk, which results in students losing interest and becoming passive. Very good use is made of audio visual aids such as video and photographs to reinforce student understanding.

123 Learning is accelerated in nearly all lessons by the very skilful management of students through high expectations of behaviour. Teachers create a relaxed yet productive atmosphere in classes which is highly conducive to learning. Teachers expect much of students as in a Year 9 lesson on coasts where the study of processes is more common at GCSE. Teachers encourage students to persevere when faced with difficulty and, as a result, they readily engage in classroom activities, working with diligence and enthusiasm. Higher attaining students in particular are attaining a deep understanding of complex geographic issues, such as the environmental conflict arising from urban development.

124 Questioning is often effectively used to challenge and develop students' understanding. The department skilfully uses a wide range of learning activities, which are challenging, interesting and usually well matched to the needs of individual students. These are having a positive impact on the attainment, particularly that of higher attaining students. Group work, role-play and simulations are very well used in enabling students to challenge and support each other in their learning. This was well demonstrated in a Year 12 lesson on energy resources where students researched a topic and then shared their finding with the class. Attainment would be enhanced if these activities were developed to ensure that the progress of lower attaining students was accelerated, especially at Key Stage 4.

125 In most lessons, which are longer than in most schools, very good levels of concentration and

interest are well fostered by a brisk and purposeful pace. Time is used to the full with teachers fully engaging students in productive and interesting tasks. These are usually well matched to students' prior attainment, resulting in them maintaining interest and becoming active learners. Progress in most lessons is accelerated by the teacher's careful planning, which designs activities that encourage students to "find out" rather than being "told". The confidence of teachers not to over direct students in this way is rewarded by the students' sense of achievement at their discovery of knowledge, seen, for example, in a Year 10 lesson on urban renewal where the sequence of tasks led students to "discovering" the link between urban land use planning and community needs. This approach is not uniform across the department, however, and in a small minority of lessons too much time is spent on low level tasks such as copying notes and diagrams, which prevents students from working at full stretch.

126 Homework is well used to support students' interest and understanding of their work. Many tasks are set which encourage research skills, particularly the use of computers to search for and present information. Nearly all students are keen to succeed and most understand how well they are achieving.

127 The subject is well led and managed by an efficient and effective head of department working closely with a team of enthusiastic geographers. They have a shared commitment to raise standards. The department identifies clear, quantified targets for improvements and devises strategies to reach them. The shared vision of the department fully matches that of the school. The geography staff complement each other in terms of their range of experience, and the head of department is beginning to have a strong impact on creating a culture of self-evaluation in the subject. Leadership would be enhanced through a more systematic approach to monitoring the work of the department through lesson observation and the use of performance data.

128 Progress since the last inspection has been good. Standards of the higher attaining students have been improved, but there are still too many students attaining the lower grades at Key Stage 4.

129 It is now up to the department to build on this progress by continuing to develop consistent teaching strategies that maintain and improve the attainment of all students and of making greater use of assessments to monitor student progress and intervene when under achievement is identified.

HISTORY

130 Students' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above the national average for students of a similar age. This is shown both in the National Curriculum teachers' assessments and in the standards of work seen during the inspection of students in Year 9. Standards are also above average at the end of Key Stage 4. GCSE results have been in line with the average over the last two years but the standards being reached by students in the current Years 10 and 11 are higher. Post-16 the number of students studying for GCE Advanced level has more than trebled. In 2000 students' attainment was in line with the national average. The work of students currently in Year 13 reflects similar standards. Students achieve well at Key Stage 3 in relation to their attainment on entry and at Key Stage 4 and post-16 their achievement is satisfactory when compared with the standards they achieved at the beginning of Key Stage 4 and Year 12 respectively.

131 Students' good achievement at Key Stage 3 results in good historical knowledge, understanding and skills which they use increasingly effectively in their work. Many students demonstrate a mature grasp of key issues and an ability to make links in analysing events and in providing substantiated explanations. For instance, in a Year 9 lesson on the causes of World War 2, students used their good knowledge and understanding very well to interpret and compare evidence in making judgements for and against appeasement. By the time they reach Key Stage 4, higher attaining students especially have very good knowledge and understanding which they use to good effect in their learning. Historical skills of investigation, interpretation, empathy and the ability to think chronologically develop well, especially in the case of higher attaining students. Post-16 the majority of students have sound knowledge and understanding with higher attaining students demonstrating a mature grasp of key issues and a very

good ability to link and compare factors, and to identify and evaluate conflicting evidence. As at Key Stage 4, students' written work is stronger than their oral work. Writing develops very well becoming increasingly well structured, analytical and clearly focused. Most reflects clearly the students' capacity for thorough research and the good use of evidence to support cogent and sustained argument. The work of the highest attaining students is mature and sophisticated indicating clearly very detailed and wide research, and their ability to interpret and evaluate very difficult texts. Students' oral work is, however, weaker. Contributions in lessons are often monosyllabic and while knowledge and understanding of the topic being studied are good, with the exception of the highest attaining students, students' ability to think laterally and to discuss their work in a wider historical context is often disappointingly limited.

132 Students with special educational needs make good progress. Their learning needs are well known and met by clear teaching and materials well adapted to meet their learning requirements. They are also helped to learn by the good learning ethos in lessons and by the support of their peers. The support of classroom assistants is very effective in helping them to make good progress to meet specific targets, for example, those on their individual education plans, and to improve their literacy skills.

133 Students' high levels of motivation, interest and initiative, together with the very good relationships and behaviour in lessons, are major factors in promoting achievement. Achievement is also very strongly promoted by the good quality of the teaching. During the inspection teaching was judged to be good or better in all but one lesson where it was satisfactory. In one of the nine lessons seen it was very good, and in two it was excellent.

134 Students acquire good knowledge and understanding of the topics being studied as a result of the skilful sharing of the teachers' good, and in many cases very good, subject knowledge. Their interest is sustained and their knowledge enriched in many lessons by very good narrative, and their understanding is deepened by clear explanation. For example, students in a Year 13 lesson were helped to grasp the complexities of the Henry VIII's motives for the passing of the Six Articles by the teacher's authoritative presentation and very clear explanation. Detailed planning and clear learning objectives ensures a clear focus in all lessons.

135 Teaching is very effective in promoting historical skills and in enabling students to work accurately as historians. Students' learning is very well consolidated and reinforced by well conceived guidance, structures and systems for revision. In the great majority of lessons a good pace of learning is sustained through a variety of well-timed activities. There are, however, a few where learning is slowed because too long is allowed for introductions and for students to complete tasks, as was the case in a Year 9 lesson on the causes of World War 2, where insufficient challenge combined with too slow a pace of work resulted in students making less progress than to be expected. There are occasions also where learning and students' confidence as independent learners are restricted by the learning being over directed by the teacher. This is often a feature of GCE Advanced level lessons, where, while exposition is of a very high quality, too tight a control of learning by the teacher results in learning of a higher order being impeded by insufficient opportunities for students to initiate and make a lively contribution to discussion, argument and the proposal of hypotheses. This was reflected, for instance, in a Year 12 lesson where despite the students' evident capacity for independent learning, the opportunities for them to take initiative, for example, in the initial scrutiny of sources, were restricted by the teacher's tendency to over direct and control learning.

136 Students' progress is monitored effectively through the regular and thorough marking of their work which includes clear guidance for improvement, and systematic formal assessment. Their research skills are supported very well through homework tasks which are carefully planned as an integral part of the learning.

137 The quality of work in the history department benefits from the good leadership and management provided by the subject leader who provides vision and very clear direction. Teachers are well supported and procedures for the review and development of work are systematic and thorough. The school's aims to raise standards are very well supported. Good progress has been made since the last inspection in improving standards, and the aspects of teaching identified as needing attention. However, the arrangement whereby the leader of the subject continues to hold the post in an acting capacity after a period of more than 18 months is unsatisfactory. He does not presently have a role in monitoring

through lesson observations which is left exclusively to the head of social sciences and members of the leadership team.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

138 A fifth of students in Years 10 and 11 take the combined GCSE information technology and business studies course as an option and standards improved in the last year with 60 per cent of students gaining grades A* to C compared with around a half nationally. In the GCE Advanced level course in information technology, a third of students achieved high grades but the overall pass rate was below national average.

139 Students come to the school with skills close to the national average in terms of being able to use information and communication technology to select, structure and present information in different ways and for different purposes. The developing use of computers in the different Year 9 subjects enables students to strengthen those skills in what are mainly word processing and simple desktop publishing activities. Students also demonstrate sound research skills through the increasing use of the Internet for class and homework. Students also use computers for control when they are involved in computer-aided design and manufacture activities in design and technology. Other information and communication technology skills, such as those for modelling, monitoring and measuring, are less evident because of the limited opportunities in subject areas. The nine hour block of information and communication technology lessons all students receive at some point in Year 9 helps confirm and consolidate earlier middle school work but does not extend it, because of the limited time available. Therefore, at the end of Key Stage 3, although standards are close to national average there are a number of important skills that remain underdeveloped, and relatively few students demonstrate the highest levels of attainment. As a result, achievement is unsatisfactory with students' attainment in information and communication technology not reflecting the higher levels they show in most of their other subjects.

140 In work seen, students taking the combined GCSE in information technology and business studies as an option course reach average national standards. The GCSE students use the main applications competently, particularly word-processing and the Internet. In a lesson on database design, those students could produce their own data collection sheets, with the higher attaining students showing a better understanding of context and need as well as being able to evaluate their work effectively. All Key Stage 4 students take a core information and communication technology lesson as part of a carousel. Furthermore, other subjects are beginning to make better use of information and communication technology and are encouraging students to use computers to organise and present GCSE coursework. Much of this includes Internet research, competent use of word processing and effective use of spreadsheets for graphical presentation. Overall, standards in these main applications are in line with national average and if the highest levels of attainment are still limited, the expanding use of information and communication technology ensures that student achievement is satisfactory.

141 Standards in the GCE Advanced level in information and communication technology are in line with national average. The students have a secure understanding of the social and legal implications for information and communication technology and are able to work with increasing skills and independence in developing information systems. This was evident in Year 12, where students were able to devise their own relational databases. Information and communication technology is well used in post-16 courses and students use it effectively in coursework assignments.

142 In general, students are very positive about using computers in their lessons particularly in those areas that they find intrinsically interesting, such as accessing the Internet and using text and graphics in presentations. However, the lack of an examination target in the core lesson in Key Stage 4 results in some students showing less focus and application, particularly in developing their knowledge of and skills in the wider applications of information and communication technology. On occasion this leads to inattention and misbehaviour.

143 In lessons seen, teaching was almost always at least satisfactory and in a third of lessons is good. Where practice is strong, the teacher has a secure specialist knowledge that is used well in the delivery of the GCE Advanced and Advanced Subsidiary level courses. In those courses the students are sufficiently challenged and develop a good understanding. Also helpful for those taking the examination courses are the clear assessment guidelines that enable all students to evaluate their own progress. Other strengths include effective use of question and answer to confirm and consolidate prior learning, and firm, though positive class management that ensures that GCSE students, in particular, stay on task and make good progress. The less strong and unsatisfactory teaching is more evident in the core Key Stage 3 and 4 courses where a lack of examination or other assessment targets and less engaging learning tasks result in a loss of student interest and momentum.

144 The school has satisfactorily addressed the lack of strategic management raised in the last inspection report. However, while monitoring of lessons takes place, particularly by members of the leadership team, there is not yet systematic observation and monitoring of lessons in place by the head of the curriculum area. The considerable improvement in resources has been appreciated by staff and students, and has begun to stimulate a more thorough planning and development of cross-curricular use of information and communication technology. Particular areas of strength exist in design and technology, science and the humanities. Coverage of the National Curriculum requirement is patchy in both key stages but sufficient. Cross-curricular use is still very limited in Key Stage 3 and this is unfortunate because the school has not yet addressed the concern raised in the last report about the very limited time for the taught programme in Year 9. The reliance on those few hours as a means of assessing student attainment in Key Stage 3 and lack of other subjects' involvement in monitoring student progress in information and communication technology is unsatisfactory. The school continues to increase the momentum for staff and resource development and needs to strengthen the delivery of National Curriculum Programme of Study in both key stages, and introduce key skills for post-16 students, in order to raise further standards of attainment.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

[French and Spanish]

145 Modern languages are now a strength of the school. French is part of the core curriculum in Years 9 to 11 and standards are above average. Students achieve well and sustain good progress throughout Key Stages 3 and 4. Gifted and talented students achieve very well, and many produce work of high quality. The rising trend over the past three years has been faster than the national improvement and is in marked contrast to the situation at the time of the last inspection.

146 At Key Stage 3 the proportion of students aged 14 assessed at National Curriculum levels 5 and 6, above the national expectation, is higher than in most schools. Current standards in Year 9 show a similar picture, with the highest attaining students achieving these levels six months in advance of the end of the key stage. They can contrast present and past tenses, give reasons and express opinions. An unusually strong feature of the work of many students is their ability to extend simple sentences, adding relative clauses to make their writing more interesting and personal. The typical student, at average level 4 in all skills, can say and write statements in the past tense, and write paragraphs, for example, on the school timetable. Understanding of both gist and detail is strong in both listening and reading comprehension.

147 At the age of 16, GCSE standards in French are above average and the small number of dual linguists achieve good results too in Spanish. The school enters almost all students for the full course in French, well above the national average. In 2000 all were graded and over half of all entrants, including

over two-thirds of the girls, passed at A* to C. Boys do well compared with boys nationally, and the amount by which girls outperform them has reduced significantly over recent years, but the gap is still wider than the national average. As is the case nationally students tend to perform less well in modern languages than in their other subjects, but overall by a smaller amount than is the case elsewhere because girls' standards are so high.

148 It was not possible to inspect Year 11 lessons, but, as at Key Stage 3, standards in the samples of work seen reflect that of examination results. Some written work is of a very high standard. The highest attainers, in the A/B range, write interestingly and with originality, constructing complex sentences rich in structure and content. Coursework includes word-processed tourist publicity pamphlets and memories of early childhood. As in previous years, over half the students are within the A* to C range. The typical student can use present and past tenses and infinitive phrases accurately, and present an argument on subjects such as television and smoking. Lower attainers attempt more ambitious constructions than is usually the case, and can write simple dialogues and letters. They achieve particularly well in Spanish. Study skills are strong.

149 Students achieve well because teachers have high expectations of them. Students know how to learn and are keen to do so. They are well motivated and take a pride in presenting their work carefully and accurately. Their progress is enhanced by the knowledge they gain from their termly self-reviews and target-setting. The highest attaining students in Years 9 and 10 achieve very well and write correctly constructed patterns of language because they have learnt to say and use them in natural situations in class. Students make rapid early gains when starting Spanish as their second language. By the end of their first term in Year 9, for example, they can typically write simple letters and paragraphs on their home and family. However, achievement could be still higher in oral work in both languages. Students perform well enough from memory when required, but not enough are prepared to take risks, preferring the security of working from what they have written down.

150 Most students with special educational needs achieve well where the curriculum is suitably modified for them. In the separate lower sets expectations are suitably high and tasks appropriate, so that by age 16 the students can say and write short sentences. In other sets, however, some do not always progress as well because teachers sometimes do not plan well enough to meet their individual needs.

151 GCE Advanced level results in French are usually good with, typically, a third of entrants achieving A/B grades. In 2000, results were not quite as good as expected from the students' earlier GCSE standards. In the sample of written and oral work seen current standards in Year 13 are average for the course. Students write well-constructed essays, for example, on conservation and human rights, but orally they do not improvise or paraphrase confidently. Students in Year 12 make progress expressing abstract ideas, but some take time to adjust to the demands of Advanced level. There have been no students in Spanish for three years.

152 Standards are high because of students' good literacy skills, their very good attitudes to learning and, above all, the quality of teaching. The feature which characterises teaching is its consistently high quality. It is good at all key stages, very good or outstanding in half the lessons observed, with none unsatisfactory. It is best when lessons are conducted exclusively in French or Spanish, and rigorous drilling is followed by practice activities which show very good judgement of the fine balance between support and challenge. Because tasks are motivating and suitably matched to the development of skills, students are kept active and their learning is managed expertly. Teachers instil a sense of purpose, not a moment is wasted and, as a result, students progress quickly. For example, in Spanish in Year 10, assured techniques with the overhead projector helped reinforce memorization of food phrases, and in a top set French in Year 9 the teacher's thorough drilling of present reflexive phrases enabled students to add new learning quickly to those they recalled from memory. Particularly good is the structuring of tasks, so that students learn in achievable steps. In Year 9 Spanish, students were helped to say what facilities there are in the village, building sentences part by part. Learning was

excellent in a Year 10 French lesson where students practised skills in turn in a series of activities linking tape, text and paired dialogue on the theme of a car breakdown.

153 It is teaching of this quality, and very good whole school and curriculum management, which has made the difference since the last inspection. Progress has been very good, with significant advances in ethos and standards over the past year. There is a clear sense of direction and a shared commitment to continued improvement. The major strength of the department is this unity. Very good policies are followed consistently and assessment practice, involving other schools in the local pyramid, is good. Foreign links, including the French exchange and Year 13 work experience in France, play an important part in further developing students' interest in the subject.

154 In order to raise standards still further the curriculum leader should ensure through regular monitoring that high standards of teaching are maintained and that assessment data is used routinely in the planning of lessons. In addition, the department should agree strategies for developing oral work, in particular encouraging all students to speak without text and spontaneously, and to improve their pronunciation.

MUSIC

155 At the time of inspection the head of department was absent with a long-term illness. The teaching of lessons was undertaken by four subject specialist supply teachers, but the lack of co-ordination and overview of the work of the department resulted in weaknesses in practice, especially in the delivery of the National Curriculum at Key Stage 3.

156 Standards at Key Stage 4 and post-16 match national averages.. By the age of 16 the attainment of students who have followed the GCSE course in music matches the national average, with around two-thirds of those entered gaining A* to C grades. This trend has been consistent over the past three years. There is no recent history of Advanced level courses in music in the school. The attainment of students currently following this course is in line with average attainment nationally.

157 The standards achieved by the students currently at Key Stage 3 are, however, below average. They are making unsatisfactory progress in all components of the National Curriculum. For example, other than those receiving instrumental lessons, students are not developing satisfactory performing skills and in composing they are not able to structure and extend their ideas. Students' listening skills are also unsatisfactory. When listening to music they are not given specific features to recognise or identify. Research topics are not specific, and students are unable to make constructive use of their time. The sources of information available in the department are not sufficient to support students' research, and no use is made of the school library. Students' progress is hindered because teachers face difficulties in building on to their achievement in Years 7 and 8 because there is no documented information about their prior attainment, and there is no available scheme of work for them to follow in the interpretation of the National Curriculum.

158 Students following the GCSE course, most of whom play instruments or pursue musical interests outside school, are able to build on this experience and make good progress in performing. Most students have a grasp of basic composing techniques but few create imaginative pieces. Students in Year 10 were able to demonstrate their abilities to improvise rhythms in a Latin style, could create balanced phrases and understood how to extend their compositions by using rondo form. Listening skills are developing satisfactorily, but students' aural responses are weak and their ability to use appropriate technical and descriptive language when writing about music they hear is not well developed.

159 Advanced level students, who are well motivated and determined to succeed are catching up rapidly in response to well informed and systematic teaching. They have good performing skills but their harmonic work is still insecure. Their understanding of appropriate progressions and their ability to avoid technical errors are below what could be expected for this stage of the course and do not yet reflect their capabilities. Their scholarship is good but there are important gaps in their background knowledge.

160 The progress of gifted and talented students in the sixth form is good, but there are no policies for identifying these students elsewhere in the department.

161 Students at all stages enjoy music, and Advanced level students are impressively tenacious and positive, providing excellent role models for younger students. Some students in Year 9 have poor powers of concentration and independent learning, and waste time during lessons, but students in Years 10 and 11 work purposefully and are anxious to succeed.

162 The quality of teaching is good post-16, satisfactory at Key Stage 4, but unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3. In the lessons seen during the inspection, teaching was satisfactory or better in 66 per cent, unsatisfactory in 11 per cent, and poor in 22 per cent. The unsatisfactory and poor teaching occurred at Key Stage 3 where failure to comply with the National Curriculum requirements resulted in poor skills development, and the setting of undemanding written work such as that describing the mechanics of instruments that had little musical value. In many cases, tasks were not well structured and time was poorly used. The lack of guidance for the work of teachers was an important factor in weakening practice at Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4 and post-16, the work of teachers was more securely guided by external examination syllabuses. The quality of instrumental teaching is satisfactory and at times good, but occasionally expectations are too low and some students under-achieve.

163 Extra-curricular opportunities do not at present take place on a regular basis. However, post-16 music students collaborated to produce *Joseph and The Amazing Technicolour Dreamcoat* in which around 50 students of all ages, and some staff, took part. All aspects of the production, including rehearsing, staging, lighting, choreography and pre-recording of instrumental music and effects, were undertaken by these students who achieved very high standards of performance and contributed enormously to the cultural life and the ethos of the school. Similar efforts to maintain interest in the school's musical activities resulted in a "Rock and Pop" concert, which had become an annual tradition under the direction of the head of music.

164 Teaching and learning in music are not well supported. Weaknesses in the management of the department extend beyond the current absence of the head of department. There are important gaps in documentation relating to schemes of work at all stages, assessment schemes are not in operation and there is not sufficient information to enable progress to be maintained in the absence of the head of department. There is no department development plan. Accommodation for music is good, although storage spaces are untidy and are becoming filled with equipment awaiting repair. There are no satisfactory arrangements for the regular repair of broken equipment. Resources are unsatisfactory. There is not sufficient information technology equipment, with the result that the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum in music cannot be met; there are shortfalls both in the quantity and the quality of keyboards and the condition of these and of the audio equipment is deteriorating.

165 Since the previous inspection standards of attainment have been maintained in Key Stage 4 and good development has taken place with the introduction of Advanced level courses. However, largely because of the recent unforeseeable circumstances, standards of attainment by younger students have fallen, and effective management systems are not in place. Improvement, therefore, is not fully satisfactory.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

166 Standards at Key Stage 3 are broadly in line with national age related expectations. The majority of 14 year olds are on line to achieve appropriate levels at the end of the key stage. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls. In the course that all students take in Key Stage 4, no Year 11 students were observed. In lessons, in Year 10, the majority of students attain as expected for their age and are on line to achieve appropriate age-related expectations at the end of the key stage.

167 At the end of Key Stage 3 the achievement of students is satisfactory. In association football,

for example, boys have secure close control and passing skills but in basketball, though passing and dribbling skills are secure, standards of accuracy in shooting are less well developed. In netball, girls pass and receive well in space but sometimes find difficulty in creating the space to do so. In Year 10 achievement continues to be satisfactory in the course that all students take. In association football, for example, boys display secure all-round skills and techniques and, in small-sided games, effectively analyse the use of passing skills in relation to space and movement on or off the ball. In netball, girls' footwork and pivot skills are well developed and in small-sided games they are successfully developing their use of correct blocking techniques.

168 Across both these key stages, students have a general understanding of the principles and procedures of warm-up. In some lessons, though, they are given insufficient responsibility for leading aspects of this. Although no students identified as having learning needs were observed with additional help, they are well supported, integrated and make good progress. Students with physical needs are well supported through individually tailored activities when appropriate.

169 GCSE physical education is a well-established and popular course with students. Since the last inspection the proportion of students achieving A* to C grade passes has been broadly in line or just above the national average for all maintained schools. In 2000, however, students achieved very well with 79 per cent of the entrants gaining A* to C grade passes. No Year 11 lessons were observed but a scrutiny of a sample of their theory folders together with their predicted grades suggests they are achieving well. They have, for example, a good grasp of the syllabus requirements for anatomy and physiology and of the factors affecting physical performance. This is clearly a result of a good quality structured and focused course that is also indicative of good quality teaching. Year 10 students are also achieving well in both their theory and practical lessons. In swimming, for example, both boys and girls are successfully refining their stroke techniques.

170 In both their theory and practical lessons, Year 12 Advanced Subsidiary students are developing a secure grasp of sports physiology through, for example, comparing their knowledge of anatomy and physiology to practical activities such as hockey. At the same time they are making good progress in developing their knowledge and understanding of tactical play. In 2000, the small group of students taking the GCE Advanced physical education course achieved well in relation to expectations. In their theory lessons in, for example, the psychology of sport module, present Year 13 students are coming to terms well with the complexities of attribution theory as applied to sports' coaches. Though some are experiencing difficulties with anatomy and physiology in relation to sports physiology, predicted grades suggest they should achieve well at the end of the course.

171 Overall, the quality of teaching is good in Year 9 and Key Stage 4 and very good at post-16. There are no significant weaknesses in the quality of teaching – this is having a positive impact on standards, particularly in the examination courses. The high expectations of teachers, the intellectual and physical challenge offered, together with the overall very positive attitudes and relationships amongst students, all help to create a positive learning atmosphere. All are thus enabled to learn well and make good progress. In a Year 10 boys' association football lesson, for example, all were fully involved in aspects of planning, performing and evaluating the effectiveness of the use of their passing in small-sided games. This then deepens their knowledge and understanding of the principles of effective passing techniques and improves their performance. Students are further made aware of their capabilities in lessons because teachers circulate well and offer constructive praise and criticism throughout. In post-16 theory lessons, the enthusiasm of the teachers together with a structured and well-planned variety of activities helps ensure students remain motivated and thus successfully come to grips with the complexities of the material being taught. This is further indicative of teachers' very good all-round knowledge and understanding of the subject.

172 There are a few inconsistencies, which if addressed will improve the quality of teaching even further. On occasion, there are insufficient opportunities for peer evaluation and coaching. In Year 9

association football and netball lessons students' involvement in this kind of activity would have enabled them to identify more effectively strengths in one another's performance as well as areas for improvement. In Year 9 lessons, the naming by teachers of the muscle groups being stretched in warm-up would better prepare those students who opt to take the GCSE course in Key Stage 4. Sometimes, at the end of practical lessons, teachers tend to do all the evaluation rather than extend students' thinking by asking them for their views as to how they think they have made progress and what they feel they need to do to improve further.

173 The curriculum is broad, balanced and meets the requirements of National Curriculum 2000. There is, however, a lack of clarity in the structure of the course that all follow at Key Stage 4. It is unclear as to which of the activities are the two being studied in depth by students. At Key Stage 3 there is not enough curriculum time for physical education – this does not allow sufficient progress to be made by the end of Year 9 and higher levels to be reached. Schemes of work for the course that all students follow do not yet fully match the demands of the new National Curriculum. Though provision at post-16 is enhanced by examination courses, a lack of timetabled recreational physical education narrows students' learning opportunities. A strong range of inter-school competitive fixtures as well as a range of recreational extra-curricular activities continue to extend opportunities for students. As a result of the dedication and enthusiasm of teachers, individuals have gained representative honours at district, county and regional level in a variety of sports and four individuals have achieved national ranking success in their sports. Teams have won tournaments at district level in a variety of games.

174 There were no teacher assessments available in 2000 for the course that all follow. However, the department has now introduced the new assessment levels introduced in September as part of National Curriculum 2000. The use of these, together with improved reporting procedures, will then inform parents as to how their children are progressing in the course that all follow and complement the existing excellent assessment procedures in place for the examination courses. Physical education teachers are very experienced but other whole-school responsibilities of three of the team mean they are now able to spend less time on supporting extra-curricular activities. Despite staffing complexities and the recently introduced curriculum and assessment changes, there is effective leadership in the department. This has enabled the department to continue to build upon the strengths highlighted at the last report. Standards in the course that all follow have been maintained as have standards in the GCSE course. Examination courses have been introduced for post-16 students and have grown in popularity. The lack of a dedicated teaching room for examination courses detracts from the ethos of this provision. The consistency of the quality of teaching has shown an improvement, which is reflected in overall standards of attainment and students' achievements.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

175 The standards achieved at the end of Key Stage 3 are in line with the expectations as outlined in the steps of Staffordshire's Agreed Syllabus for religious education. Students have a basic knowledge and understanding of the religions they study. They are beginning to show respect for other people's beliefs and can make simple links between beliefs and lifestyle. By the end of Key Stage 4 they are achieving expected standards in the work they cover but overall their attainment is below expectations. This is because they cannot cover all aspects of the Agreed Syllabus in the time made available. It was not possible to see any post-16 religious education being taught. However, the course content, samples of work and discussion with teachers and students make it possible to judge that they are attaining broadly in line with expectations in the work they do. The work enables them to develop their ability to evaluate the role of religious belief and practice in society and analyse differing responses to moral issues.

176 Year 9 students make satisfactory progress but progress over Key Stage 4 is slowed by the lack of time available to cover all the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. Their achievement is satisfactory in the work they do. Their knowledge and understanding are satisfactory and are used well to provide description and explanation of religious beliefs and practices. For example, in Year 9

students study a unit of work on “Being a Muslim”. They consider how relationships, dress and diet are all affected for people who practise their religion. In Year 10 in a unit on “Poverty and Wealth” through case studies, they consider how Christians might respond to these issues. Post-16 students fill out a student beliefs questionnaire and this contributes to a discussion of the role of religion in British society today.

177 Higher attaining students and those with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Systems for more effectively dealing with students with special educational needs are developing and sufficient support is given by teachers to ensure that work is understood and progress made. Teachers have appropriate expectations of higher attaining students and tasks to extend their knowledge and understanding are provided in the form of “extension tasks”. Departmentally produced work and information sheets which start with simpler questions and move through to more complex ones are also used.

178 Students respond well to appropriate levels of challenge and engage closely with their work. For example, Year 9 students were very focused in completing their work on the difference between halal and haram foods in Islam and were able to discuss in some detail some of the implications of this distinction for Muslims in Britain today. They were prepared not only to answer questions posed by the teacher but asked some perceptive questions and made some useful comments themselves. In Year 11 they consider religious responses to racism, using contemporary examples. They present their own ideas and are able to give valid reasons for it, drawing on the work they have covered. There is very little unfinished work in books and presentation is generally good. Relationships, behaviour and attitudes are good which contribute to a positive learning ethos in lessons.

179 Teaching is satisfactory. In the lessons seen teaching was either good or satisfactory. The teaching team consists of skilled teachers with a commitment to the subject area. They plan well in line with the scheme of work and activities are appropriate and sufficiently challenging. There is a variety of types of work recorded in books, including personal reflection, comprehension, note-taking and responses to stimulus such as newspaper reports. However, none of the teaching team has a detailed specialist knowledge of, or qualification in, religious education. On occasion this lack of subject expertise shows itself, for example, in the responses made to some of the students’ questions.

180 Teachers have appropriate expectations which result in students making good effort in their work. For example, in Year 10 students address issues of wealth and poverty which include a focus on liberation theology in Christianity and a consideration of their own personal response. The quality of written and oral responses to this unit of work indicates that they think deeply about some of the issues raised. Teacher explanation and open-ended questioning is used well to check and extend knowledge and understanding. In the post-16 religious education units students are encouraged to work both individually and in small groups to consider the implications of the issues raised. Small group and paired work is used to enable students to learn from each other. Resources for learning are satisfactory. The department has focused on developing its range of textbooks and there is suitable video stimulus material to use in each unit. There is, however, no regular use of religious artefacts to provide stimulus and extend learning.

181 Over the past two years the scheme of work has developed well. It is detailed and provides a firm foundation for teacher lesson planning which is of a good quality. The scheme needs to take more account of the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus when planning for Years 12 and 13. A range of suitable tasks is planned into the scheme of work and the pace of learning is appropriate. The development of literacy is well supported by the written and oral work engaged in and by the correct and detailed use of religious terminology. Planning for the use of information communication technology is

developing but as yet there is insufficient use made of the Internet and CD ROM for research purposes and word processing for presenting work is very limited.

182 Students' involvement and interest is satisfactorily supported by homework, which is set to extend work begun in lessons. Students are keen to do well. The department's assessment policy and practice have improved recently but are still not focused enough on the standards that students are achieving and the progress they are making in the subject. Consequently students are not sufficiently clear about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve their work further. The recent introduction of the steps in learning in the Agreed Syllabus have yet to be incorporated into the department's assessment practice.

183 Religious education makes a good contribution to the school's provision of opportunities for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its students. It does this through the curriculum content, which focuses on how religious belief affects the way in which believers live. It also contributes through the way in which lessons are taught. Students are encouraged to think for themselves and share their ideas. In some lessons they are given, as a matter of course, a brief time at the conclusion of the lesson to reflect on what they have learned during the lesson. They learn from the teachings of the religions they study by considering the significance of different practices and presenting their own responses to these.

184 Management of the department is satisfactory. Religious education is part of the social science faculty in Years 9 and in Key Stage 4. The head of department and his team of teachers are committed to improving the delivery of the subject area but lack of time over Key Stage 4 hinders the full coverage of the Agreed Syllabus. Consequently statutory requirements are not met. Appropriate priorities have been set for subject development, within the time available, and these are monitored effectively by the curriculum team leader and head of faculty. The full involvement of all staff who teach religious education in subject development is limited due to their other responsibilities. For example, none have undergone subject specific training apart from the head of department and full subject meetings are very limited. Post-16 religious education is part of the tutorial period but the head of department has no formal oversight. There is informal liaison about the content of the programme which is managed by the head of post-16. The two explicit religious education units offered are insufficient to meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. There are, however, other parts of the tutorial period that are being considered with regard to incorporating further aspects of religious education into them.

185 Since the previous inspection unsatisfactory progress has been made with regard to meeting statutory requirements in Key Stage 4 and at post-16. In Year 9, however, good progress has been made and statutory requirements are now met. The standards achieved also show some improvement and the quality of planning and the schemes of work show significant improvement. Consideration has been given to following the GCSE short course at Key Stage 4 but at the moment this is deemed not to be feasible and attention has focused on the production of an internally produced certificate of achievement to recognise the work done over the key stage.