

INSPECTION REPORT

DARRICK WOOD SCHOOL

Orpington

LEA area: Bromley

Unique reference number: 101658

Headteacher: Mr. A.L. Barker

Reporting inspector: Mr. J. Donovan
1846

Dates of inspection: 16-19 October 2000

Inspection number: 223708

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:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr. M. Hewitt
Date of previous inspection:	11 March 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mr. J. Donovan	Registered inspector	English as an additional language	What sort of school is it? The school's results and pupils' achievements. How well are pupils taught? What should the school do to improve further?
Mrs. R. Hall	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development. How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Mr. J. Bennathan	Team inspector	Drama	
Ms. F. Bevan	Team inspector	Physical education	
Ms. J. Dyson	Team inspector	Music Religious education	
Ms. J. Hargreaves	Team inspector	English	
Mr. R. Harris	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
Mr. A. Lazell	Team inspector	Sixth form	How well does the school care for its pupils?
Mr. J. Lee	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
Mr. S. Lucock	Team inspector	Information technology	
Mr. R. Luxton	Team inspector		How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils? How well is the school led and managed?
Mr. S. Rowe	Team inspector	History	
Mr. N. Sagar	Team inspector	Design and technology	
Mr. B. Singh	Team inspector	Science Equal opportunities	
Mrs. C. Singh	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Ms. E. Webber	Team inspector	Geography	
Mr. K. Wright	Team inspector	Art	

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Inspection Quality Division,
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Darrick Wood is a large 11-18 mixed school which has grown in size in recent years. It has a large and expanding sixth form of 364 students. The great majority of pupils live within 1½ miles of the school. It is a popular school within the local community with a long and growing waiting list. Two local grammar schools select a number of the highest attaining pupils from within the locality. Nevertheless, the school's roll reflects the full ability range and attainment on entry is, overall, above average. In comparison with its entry profile the school has a significantly high proportion of pupils with a statement of special educational need. The school accommodates a hearing impairment unit which currently makes provision for 10 pupils.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Darrick Wood is a well led school within which a well planned curriculum and good teaching lead to very high standards and very good examination results. The very good behaviour of the majority of pupils makes an important contribution to the welcoming, supportive and orderly learning environment created by the school. This is a school that cares well for its pupils' academic and personal development and achievements. It uses its resources thoughtfully and efficiently so that it provides very good value for money. The school's many strengths greatly outweigh the areas in need of improvement.

What the school does well

- Standards are very high across all age groups. Standards are at or above the national average in all subject areas except ICT at Key Stage 3. Examination results have risen sharply in recent years.
- The great majority of pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school. The school provides a calm and orderly environment within which pupils are able to flourish.
- The teaching is good. Teachers' subject knowledge is a particular strength.
- Pupils are attentive, have positive attitudes and make good progress.
- Positive relationships are evident at all levels throughout the school.
- A broad and balanced curriculum which meets all statutory requirements and is appropriate to the needs and interests of pupils is provided.
- Pupils benefit from a particularly rich and varied range of extra-curricular activities.
- Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.
- Pupils are effectively supported. They are well cared for and feel part of a safe and secure community.
- The school benefits from strong leadership and clear management. It has a very effective senior management team and governing body.
- The school's financial affairs are efficiently managed. The school fully embraces the principles of best value.

What could be improved

- Greater use should be made, at departmental level, of the data collected through the existing assessment arrangements to inform teaching and planning.
- Teaching is effective overall. However, teachers need to broaden their repertoire of teaching strategies so that the learning needs of the school's lowest attaining pupils are met in full.
- Pupils would benefit from additional opportunities at Key Stage 3 to use ICT to support their work across the curriculum.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made very substantial improvements in its provision and standards since the last inspection. Standards have risen sharply on a year to year basis. All subject areas (except ICT at Key Stage 3) now operate at, above or well above the national average when compared to all performance indicators. The quality of teaching has improved significantly with 96% of teaching now satisfactory or better compared to 82% at the time of the last inspection. Opportunities for spiritual development are much improved so that this area of the school's work is now one of its many strengths. The curriculum now meets all statutory requirements. The quality and range of extra-curricular activities have been improved at the same time as academic standards have been raised. The sixth form has grown in size and in quality. A good range of courses, strong teaching, good support arrangements and efficient class sizes now characterise the sixth form.

Whilst taking pride in the progress it has made on a number of fronts the school is well aware of the areas in which it still needs to improve. The curriculum provision for ICT has been improved significantly. However, access to ICT within subject areas remains limited at Key Stage 3. Arrangements for pupils with special educational needs have been improved in recent years and are satisfactory overall. However, the targets set for many pupils remain unclear and do not, therefore, sufficiently influence the work of mainstream teachers. Assessment information is mainly accurate and easily accessible but is not used sufficiently to inform teaching and curriculum planning.

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	A	A	A
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A	A	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

Standards are very high when compared with all schools across the country, and with schools with a similar intake.

In last summer's national tests Year 9 pupils performed well above the national average in English, mathematics and science. Standards at Key Stage 3 have risen nationally over the last few years. However, the improvement in standards secured by Darrick Wood is in excess of this national trend. At Key Stage 4 the school has widened the gap each year since the last inspection between its own performance and the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining 5 or more A* to C grades at GCSE has risen from 46% in 1996 to 72% last summer. The proportion of pupils gaining 5 or more A* to G grades at GCSE has risen to 96%. The school exceeded the challenging targets it set itself for examination success rates last year. Boys have made particularly good progress in recent years. In last summer's A level examinations sixth form students achieved an average point score of 21.3, which was well in excess of the average point score attained nationally. The relatively small number of students pursuing vocational programmes within the sixth form also achieved standards above the national average.

During the week of the inspection standards in English, mathematics and science lessons were well above average. Reading is a key strength. The majority of pupils deal well with challenging texts in a number of subjects. The fact that most pupils read regularly helps them to develop an extended vocabulary. Pupils' ability to use and apply mathematics is well developed. Attainment outside the three

core subjects is, almost without exception, high. Pupils achieve well in academic, practical and expressive areas of the curriculum.

Most pupils with a statement of special educational need make good progress. Many achieved a range of GCSE grades last summer, including grades at F and above in English and mathematics. The achievement of pupils with general learning and literacy difficulties is not far below that of the majority of pupils. The achievement of some of the pupils with hearing impairment is particularly high.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils display very positive attitudes to the school. They respond well to the high expectations the school has of them. They work hard and most are determined to do well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	The very good behaviour of the pupils makes a significant contribution to the calm and orderly learning environment created by the school.
Personal development and relationships	Positive relationships are evident throughout the school. Pupils listen to and respect the views of others. Good provision is in place to support pupils' personal development.
Attendance	The level of attendance is satisfactory. It is in line with the national average.

Pupils' positive attitudes are a key strength. They are proud of their achievements and speak positively about the school. In many lessons pupils are highly motivated and are eager to participate in the tasks they encounter. However, they are at times over reliant on their teachers and respond passively to well planned and thoughtful teaching. The behaviour of pupils is very good around the school and in lessons. They behave very well during the lunch break despite the difficult conditions created by a cramped dining room. Pupils are courteous to adults and feel that they are treated fairly by them. At 92%, the level of attendance is in line with the national average

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

During the week of the inspection 96% of the lessons seen were judged to be of a satisfactory standard or better. 55% were of a good or very good standard.

The main strength in the teaching lies in teachers' specialist subject knowledge. This allows them to give clear, detailed and extended exposition and demonstration. Teachers manage pupils well and insist on high standards of behaviour. In particular, pupils who may represent a challenge in terms of motivation and behaviour are encouraged and supported by their teachers so that they usually remain involved and make good progress. Lessons start promptly and often progress at a brisk pace. They are usually well planned and thoroughly prepared. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form care is taken by teachers to ensure that lessons deal in full with examination requirements. Homework is often used

effectively to reinforce concepts developed in lessons or to prepare the way for new areas of investigation. In practical subjects, equipment and materials are effectively managed.

These strengths in teaching combine with pupils' very good behaviour, attentive nature and willingness to follow instructions to secure, in most lessons, good progress. Most pupils are able to sustain concentration and engage in the tasks set for extended periods. Most are aware of the standards at which they are operating and are sufficiently knowledgeable about eventual examination requirements to understand what they need to do to improve.

Whilst teaching is good overall with a number of key strengths, the majority of lessons are similar in structure and pace. Most teachers adopt the same teaching approach irrespective of the prior attainment of the pupils. There is a need to develop teaching approaches directly relevant to the particular learning needs of the school's lowest attaining pupils. Marking is usually thorough and provides helpful feedback to pupils on how to improve. However, the information gathered through marking and the well developed assessment arrangements is not used sufficiently to inform teaching.

The one-to-one teaching encountered by pupils with mild or specific learning difficulties is often good and almost always satisfactory. Pupils with physical and sensory impairments are taught well. The skill of those who provide signed English interpretation, enabling hearing impaired pupils to participate, is outstanding.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	A broad and balanced curriculum to which all pupils have equal access is provided. A particularly rich and varied range of extra-curricular activities is well attended by pupils.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Sound provision is made for pupils with special needs. Many of these pupils would benefit, though, from more detailed targets so that the tasks they pursue in lessons can be more accurately matched to their particular learning needs.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Many subject areas contribute effectively to this aspect of the school's work.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pupils are well cared for in a safe and secure environment. They feel part of a caring and supportive community.

The school regularly provides clear and detailed information for parents. The support parents give to the completion and monitoring of homework is significant and has a beneficial effect on attainment. Parents support the work of the school by fund-raising through the highly active Parents and Staff Association. The hard work and determination of this group raises the profile of the school within the community. The significant funds raised are thoughtfully used to enrich the life of the school.

The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum at Key Stage 3. The school ensures that all pupils have access to challenging and worthwhile content and ideas across the curriculum. At Key Stage 4 the school provides a strong and extensive basic common core programme as well as offering a good range of subject choice to match the needs and interests of its pupils. The school offers a broad and varied curriculum in the sixth form. The programme for PSHE is variable in quality of provision. The school offers pupils with special needs the same access to the national curriculum as other pupils. A coherent set of strategies for teaching the basic skills of literacy and numeracy is emerging. The school makes outstanding provision for extra-curricular activities.

Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. Pupils and students are given numerous opportunities across the curriculum to reflect on their experiences and to develop spiritual awareness. Assemblies provide thought-provoking opportunities for reflection. Provision for moral development is also good. There is a strong, clear and unambiguous moral code throughout the school. Pupils are keenly aware of the school rules. Social issues are widely discussed across the curriculum. The school is very active in teaching pupils to appreciate their own cultural traditions as well as the diversity and richness of other cultures.

The school enjoys strong links with its local community. Almost all the students come from within a radius of one and a half miles from the school. The school is therefore able to reflect and respond to the particular needs of its community with care and sensitivity. There are good links with careers services, with employers and with a wide range of organisations. Links with partner primary schools are strengthening continually.

Teachers know their pupils well and endeavour to meet their individual needs. The procedures for child protection are clear, well understood and followed, with staff receiving regular training. The management of health and safety is effective. Good provision is made for medical care.

The school uses a wide range of assessment tools to generate data about the achievements and progress of individual pupils. Assessment information is easily accessible to heads of department and teaching teams. However, there is little evidence to indicate that this information is then used to inform the detailed planning of teaching and learning. This is hampering the efforts of some departments to raise standards further.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides excellent leadership. He is supported by an efficient and effective group of senior managers. The rapid rate of improvement since the last inspection is directly attributable to the well co-ordinated efforts of the senior management team.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The school benefits from an active and effective governing body. Governors are knowledgeable and make a significant contribution to the development of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	There is a rigorous programme of regular reviews of the work of faculties and of progress on specific aspects of the school's work.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are effectively and efficiently used to pursue the school's identified priorities.

The headteacher and governing body have ensured that the school makes a distinctive and highly effective contribution to the education of the young people of its immediate neighbourhood. The school's distinction lies in its capacity to take pupils of all abilities and aptitudes and to ensure that they make very good progress. This applies equally to pupils with high intellectual ability, who do as well here as they would in any school, and to those with strong practical skills and interests. A particularly strong feature of the work of governors is their insistence on receiving regular and detailed reports from departments whose performance is either falling or is too low in relation to the performance of others.

Financial management is very good. The school's budget is carefully monitored. There is effective financial control and administration. Budget planning follows a clearly defined sequence giving plenty of time for consideration of priorities and for ensuring that priorities are properly supported. The principles of

best value are applied rigorously in the school's use of resources. The school is enterprising in ensuring that fair competition is ensured in the purchase of services.

The school is well staffed. The qualifications and experience of teachers and support staff match the demands of the curriculum well. The high quality of the staff's specialist subject knowledge is particularly helpful to the progress of students at GCSE and A level. The quality of the accommodation is generally high with a number of excellent purpose-built features. Given the rapid growth of the school, particularly in the sixth form, the accommodation is used to the very limits of its capacity and therefore in a highly efficient manner.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Their children are making good progress and they expect them to achieve well.• They express confidence in the leadership and management of the school.• Most feel comfortable in approaching the school with enquiries or problems.• They feel that teachers know the pupils well and take good care of them.• They are confident that an appropriate balance has been struck between academic work and extra-curricular activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• About 20% of parents feel that they are not well informed about how their child is getting on and that the school does not work closely enough with them.

Inspection evidence suggests that links with parents are effective. The school regularly provides clear and detailed information for parents. The prospectus is informative. The annual report on each pupil's progress is detailed. Parents attend a parents' evening once a year. In addition, they receive ongoing information in the form of half-termly grades for each subject.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Standards are very high when compared to the national averages at Key Stages 3 and 4 and the sixth form. In comparison with similar schools, standards in the three core subjects of English, mathematics and science range from just above to well above the national average. Standards have risen significantly year on year in almost all respects since the last inspection. With the exception of information communication technology (ICT) at Key Stage 3, all subject areas operate at, above or well above the national average and all, including ICT, have progressed in recent years.

Key Stage 3

2. In last summer's national tests 77% of Year 9 pupils attained at or above the expected standard in English. Whilst these results represent a small decline on the previous year, pupils did nevertheless attain well above the national average. Standards rose both in mathematics and science last summer. 82% of pupils in mathematics and 77% of pupils in science reached the expected standard, again performing well above the national average. When compared to similar schools, standards in English were just above the national average, attainment in science was above the national average and mathematics results were well above the national average. Standards at Key Stage 3 have risen nationally over the last few years. However, the improvement in standards secured by the school is well in excess of the national trend. When compared to similar schools, pupils make good progress from Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4.

Key Stage 4

3. At Key Stage 4 very significant improvements have been made since the last inspection. The proportion of pupils gaining 5 or more A* to C grades at GCSE has risen rapidly from 46% in 1996 to 72% last summer. The school has widened the gap each year between its own performance and the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining 5 or more A* to G grades at GCSE has also risen to 96% which is well in excess of the national average. The school has exceeded by 4% the challenging target it set itself for the percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A* to C grades last summer. Its aspirational target of 100% of its pupils gaining 5 or more A* to G grades at GCSE reflects its determination to ensure that all pupils leave Key Stage 4 with a worthwhile set of examination results. Almost all pupils with a satisfactory attendance record succeed in attaining at least at this level. Boys have made particularly good progress in recent years. The school has been successful in ensuring that the national trend of girls significantly out-performing boys is not reflected in its own examination performance.

Post-16

4. Since the last inspection the school's A level performance has also improved significantly. In last summer's examinations, the students achieved an average point score of 21.3, which was well in excess of the average point score attained nationally. Taking into account the GCSE results attained by this cohort two years ago, students made good progress to achieve such impressive A level results. A relatively small number of students pursued vocational programmes within the sixth form. However, they too achieved standards above the national average.

Standards in lessons

5. During the week of the inspection the standards at which pupils were working in English, mathematics and science lessons were well above average. Reading is a key strength which supports attainment across the curriculum. The majority of pupils deal well with challenging texts and acquire good comprehension skills. The fact that most pupils read regularly helps them to develop an extended vocabulary. Pupils' ability to use and apply mathematics is well developed. They demonstrate a good understanding of number, geometry and algebraic principles. Mental arithmetic and oral skills are less secure, particularly in older pupils. In science most pupils demonstrate a good level of knowledge across the full range of the science programme of study.
6. Attainment outside English, mathematics and science is, almost without exception, high. Most pupils have a sound knowledge of historical periods and can draw on a range of sources to successfully pursue historical enquiries. Pupils' main strength in geography lies in their ability to describe accurately geographical features and processes. In French and German, although most pupils lack an authentic accent, the majority communicate effectively through speech and written work. The practical skills and secure knowledge of resistant materials pupils develop in technology lessons allow them to propose appropriate solutions to design problems. In art, pupils are able to draw on a good range of skills and techniques to express and develop their ideas. They acquire a range of performance styles which give them the confidence they need to attain high standards in drama. Because they quickly establish secure composing, performing and listening skills, most pupils are able to participate in whole-class musical performances of an excellent standard. Pupils achieve well in most aspects of physical education. Good levels of attainment in religious education contribute to the school's effective provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Whilst attainment in ICT reaches the national standard at Key Stage 4, younger pupils operate below the standard expected nationally.

Pupils with special educational needs

7. Most pupils with special educational needs make good progress, especially at Key Stage 4. Pupils with general learning and literacy difficulties are given access to a broad curriculum at appropriate levels. Their achievement is not far below that of the majority of pupils. They make progress towards the general targets on their individual education plans. Pupils whose special needs are physical or sensory are placed in appropriate groups and their attainment is in line with those groups. The achievement of some of the pupils with hearing impairment is particularly high.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

8. Pupils' positive attitudes are a key strength. They arrive at school, and to lessons, on time with the books and materials they need to engage fully with the work set for them. Most pupils respond well to the high expectations the school has of them. They work hard and as they move up through the school they become increasingly determined to do well in examinations. They are proud of their achievements and speak positively about the school. In many lessons pupils are highly motivated and are eager to participate in the tasks they encounter. However, whilst they remain on task and work hard, pupils are often reluctant to take the initiative. They are, at times, over reliant on their teachers and respond passively to well planned and thoughtful teaching. Almost all pupils, however, work effectively in collaborative groups.

9. The behaviour of pupils is very good around the school and in lessons. Pupils behave very well during the lunch break despite the difficult conditions created by a cramped dining room. In assemblies pupils listen attentively. Incidents of poor behaviour are rare and do not significantly undermine the calm, orderly and welcoming atmosphere evident throughout the school.
10. The positive relationships, evident at all levels throughout the school, are a key strength. Pupils are courteous to adults and feel that they are treated fairly by them. They understand the effect their actions have on others. They listen carefully to each other's opinions and respond with respect to the views of others. Sixth form students take on a number of important responsibilities. For example, they help younger children to develop their reading skills and help teachers during registration periods. Some pupils are disappointed that arrangements for them to influence the life of the school (for example, through a school council) are not currently in place. However, this issue is currently being addressed by the school.
11. The level of attendance is satisfactory. It is in line with the national average. The attendance rate falls just below the 92% benchmark partly because the school categorises study leave and academic tutoring days as authorised absence rather than attendance. A change in school policy in this respect would raise the overall attendance rate by almost 2%.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

12. The school has been successful in raising the quality of teaching since the last inspection. The last inspection found 18% of lessons to be unsatisfactory. During the week of this inspection 96% of the lessons seen were judged to be of a satisfactory or better standard. 55% were of a good or very good standard.
13. The main strength in the teaching lies in teachers' specialist subject knowledge. This allows them to give clear, detailed and extended exposition and demonstration. Relationships are positive so that lessons benefit from a calm, orderly and co-operative teaching environment. Throughout the school teachers manage pupils well and insist on high standards of behaviour. In particular, pupils who may represent a challenge in terms of motivation and behaviour are encouraged and supported by their teachers so that they usually remain involved and make good progress. Lessons start promptly and usually progress at a brisk pace. Lessons are usually well planned and thoroughly prepared. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form care is taken by teachers to ensure that lessons deal in full with examination requirements. Teachers provide pupils with informative and helpful notes which provide a useful resource for revision. Many teachers offer pupils a good summary of the key learning points at the end of the lesson. These teachers often effectively recap on the previous work so that lessons build sequentially on each other, reinforcing key concepts and vocabulary. Homework is often also used to reinforce concepts developed in lessons or to prepare the way for new areas of investigation. In practical subjects, equipment and materials are effectively managed.
14. These strengths in teaching combine with pupils' good behaviour, attentive nature and willingness to follow instructions to secure good progress. Most pupils are able to sustain concentration and engage in the tasks set for extended periods. Most are aware of the standards at which they are operating and are sufficiently knowledgeable

about eventual examination requirements to understand what they need to do to improve.

15. Whilst teaching is good overall with a number of key strengths, the majority of lessons encountered by the pupils over a given week are similar in structure and pace. Most teachers adopt the same teaching approach irrespective of the prior attainment of the pupils. There is a need to develop teaching approaches directly relevant to the particular learning needs of the school's lowest attaining pupils. Pupils speak clearly and confidently, making good use of subject vocabulary. Teachers do not, however, capitalise sufficiently on these skills so that pupils have too few opportunities to develop an argument or discuss important concepts. Several departments (notably history) have established good practice in these teaching techniques from which other departments could learn. Marking is usually thorough and provides helpful feedback to pupils on how to improve. However, the information gathered through the well developed assessment arrangements is not used sufficiently to inform teaching.
16. The one-to-one teaching of pupils with mild or specific learning difficulties is often good and almost always satisfactory. There are good examples of teaching devised to raise the self-esteem and basic literacy skills of these pupils. The targets set out in individual education plans lack precision. As a result, teachers in mainstream classes struggle to respond to the specific learning needs of these pupils. Support assistants respond well to what pupils are asked to do by their teachers. Pupils with physical and sensory impairments are taught well, sometimes with the support of specialist staff. Teachers of classes which include hearing impaired pupils usually take them into account but a small number do not note sufficiently the pupils' need to lip read, or activities are set up too quickly for them to follow. The skill of those who provide signed English interpretation to enable pupils with impaired hearing to participate in learning is outstanding. The recently learnt skill of some subject teachers to sign is also valuable.

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

17. The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum at Key Stage 3. Within the 25 hours a week of taught time pupils are offered a very good range of learning experiences. Statutory requirements are met in all subjects. Since the last inspection, the school has greatly improved its provision for ICT. Provision in English, media studies, history and drama are notable strengths of the school. The school ensures that all pupils have access to challenging and worthwhile content and ideas across the curriculum. For example, all pupils in all sets have access to high quality texts in English. This provides the basis for equality of opportunity for all pupils. However, the teaching and learning strategies used are not always wholly appropriate for the lowest attaining pupils.
18. At Key Stage 4 the school provides a strong and extensive basic common core programme as well as offering a good range of subject choice to match the needs and interests of its pupils. The core includes examination courses for religious education and ICT for all pupils. This ensures that these subjects have a defined and secure place in the curriculum.
19. The school offers a broad and varied curriculum in the sixth form. Since the last inspection there has been a significant increase in the number of subjects available for study. The rate of increase in the range of subjects has been broadly in line with the very substantial growth of numbers of students in the sixth form. Nineteen subjects are offered at A level, alongside an increasing provision for vocational education through

GNVQ courses (at intermediate and advanced levels) and the Advanced Certificate in Vocational Education. All students follow an A level general studies course that includes a strand to enable the statutory requirements for the teaching of religious studies to be met. In addition a personal, social and health education programme provides good opportunities for careers education and guidance.

20. There are many opportunities in the sixth form, both academic and social, for the personal development of students. The quality of talk, debate and discussion in sixth form classes is high. The school has a very good record in public debating competitions. Rich and varied extra-curricular provision enables sixth form students to take on a range of additional responsibilities and to develop wider skills, competences and attributes within the school, the local community and beyond. A wide range of sporting activities is undertaken often with very successful results. The performing arts are given a particularly positive emphasis, as are the opportunities to contribute to voluntary and charitable activities. Frequent travel to European countries and beyond is also a significant feature of the range of challenges and opportunities available to sixth form students. Sixth form students are encouraged to take on leadership roles in the school, not least through the prefect system.
21. Since the last inspection the school has expanded the range of vocational courses. These now cover five vocational sectors across GNVQ and the Advanced Certificate in Vocational Education. Work experience placements are available to students in Key Stage 4 and post-16 and through a work shadowing programme for students following an academic option in the sixth form. Students are encouraged to find their own placements and are supported effectively by the school through the services of a full-time administrative officer.
22. The curriculum time available for careers education and guidance is modest, and reduces progressively through Key Stage 4. At lunchtime the careers room is a popular area of the school with pupils from Year 9 onwards. This success is due principally to the expertise and commitment of an external careers adviser employed by the school on a part-time basis. The quality of provision is high in both accommodation and in the scope and appropriateness of the resources available to students.
23. The programme for PSHE is variable in terms of the quality of provision. There is a need to develop a co-ordinated planning approach across all year groups and to promote a wide range of teaching styles to help pupils and students deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding.
24. The school offers pupils with special needs the same access to the national curriculum as other pupils. The school has not disapplied the national curriculum for any pupils. The results at GCSE justify this decision. The school has made progress since the last inspection in preparing targets for each pupil at SEN stages two and above. Some pupils with statements have one set of targets from their personal tutor and another from their attached individual support assistant. These two sets of targets usually overlap but do not always coincide. The individual education plans do not clarify the strategies which support staff are using or which are expected to work.
25. A coherent set of strategies for teaching the basic skills of literacy and numeracy is emerging. The cross-curricular literacy working party set up in December 1999 has produced a literacy action plan which maps out key actions, including a whole school literacy policy. Much of what is planned is constructive, imaginative and practical. It is likely to produce a significant improvement in literacy standards across the school. Effective strategies for the teaching of numeracy are also under development. For

example, strategies now being taught to pupils for mental calculation are enabling them to make good progress. Teachers discourage the use of calculators for calculations which pupils should be able to do in their heads. Science and design and technology are the principal areas where numeracy skills are improved and applied at present. The next stage is to extend these competences more widely across the curriculum. In both literacy and numeracy the school is taking full account of the rapid changes currently under way in its partner primary schools to make certain that pupils benefit from continuity and progression in their curriculum experience.

26. The school makes outstanding provision for extra-curricular activities. It has a full programme of enrichment in areas such as sport, drama, chess, photography and many other clubs and societies and extension through study opportunities provided before or after school or during breaks in the school day. These include homework clubs, extra revision classes and extra after-school tuition. Particular attention is given to provision to encourage and support the more able. The intention of the school is to extend the range of opportunities for extra-curricular experience to as large a number of pupils as possible.
27. Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. Pupils and students are given numerous opportunities to reflect on their experiences and to develop spiritual awareness across the curriculum. A clear policy statement outlines the ways in which spiritual development is encouraged through the religious education curriculum. There are opportunities to explore questions of meaning and purpose – for example, ‘why did God design a system of nature that causes so much pain, evil and suffering?’ – which are taken up eagerly by many pupils during lessons. Assemblies provide thought-provoking opportunities for reflection across the school. Further opportunities feature in drama where reflection is embedded in schemes of work and classroom practice, in music where pupils are invited to set a range of poetry to music, and in history where key events such as the Reformation are carefully studied.
28. Provision for moral development is also good. There is a strong, clear and unambiguous moral code. Values are sharply defined and reinforced in assemblies, tutorial periods and through the system of rewards and sanctions. Pupils are keenly aware of the school rules. There is an expectation that pupils will respect and value each other’s contributions to lessons and each other’s work. Moral issues are sensitively raised and considered in a wide range of areas of the curriculum, including drama (issues of censorship being discussed in Year 13), history (decision-making exercises on enquiries into questions such as ‘were the Romans brutal?’ or ‘was Caesar a tyrant?’) and religious education.
29. Social issues are widely discussed across the curriculum. For example, good work on gender stereotyping was observed in a sixth form modern foreign language lesson. Effective co-operative activity in music and history lessons was frequently noted. The choice of themes and issues in drama was helpful in establishing a better understanding of a range of social issues. The involvement of sixth form students with younger pupils in the school is a good feature, not least in terms of the help they provide in supporting pupils’ learning and the work they do as prefects.
30. The school is very active in teaching pupils to appreciate their own cultural traditions as well as the diversity and richness of other cultures. A major contribution to cultural understanding is through the programme of working with paintings. The head of the communications faculty has prepared, in conjunction with others, excellent teaching materials that help pupils to learn about and look closely at high quality reproductions of

works of art placed throughout the school. Pupils are given many thoughtfully selected opportunities to develop an understanding and appreciation of European and non-European cultural heritage – both from the recent past and earlier periods of history – in art lessons, in textiles, and in modern foreign languages. There is very positive teaching of other cultures in geography lessons. World music is included in the curriculum. There is an exceptionally strong programme of visits to museums, art galleries, theatres and concerts across all year groups. There are also many good opportunities for travel, including visits to France and Germany in relation to modern foreign languages.

31. The school enjoys strong links with its local community. Almost all the students come from within one and a half miles of the school. The school is therefore able to reflect and respond to the particular needs of its community with care and sensitivity. There are good links with careers services, with employers and with a wide range of organisations, for example, local churches and the Rotary Club, which help pupils to understand society and their role as citizens. Links with partner primary schools are strengthening continually. The school is determined to work in genuine partnership, for example in understanding primary classrooms better and in ensuring continuity in the curriculum and experience of children who join Year 7. This growing contact is widely appreciated by the primary schools.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

32. Pupils are well cared for in a safe and secure environment. They feel part of a supportive community. Teachers know their pupils well and endeavour to meet their individual needs. The procedures for child protection are clear, well understood and followed, with staff receiving regular training. The management of health and safety is effective. Good provision is made for medical care. The full-time school nurse works closely with pastoral staff. In addition, an appropriate proportion of staff is qualified to give first aid treatment. The school has good support from external agencies.
33. Behaviour in the school is very good. The systems of rewards and punishments are well understood by pupils. Teachers apply a tiered system of punishment and referral with consistency. Good lines of communication are evident between staff with curricular and pastoral responsibilities. Instances of bullying are rare and are dealt with swiftly and effectively by the school.
34. The school benefits from an electronically based method of registering pupils' attendance, the levels of which are at the national average. The school actively pursues reasons for absence.
35. The school uses a wide range of assessment tools to generate data about the achievements and relative progress of individual pupils. Pupils' work is marked and assessed on a regular basis. Assessment information is easily accessible to heads of department and teaching teams. However, there is little evidence to indicate that this information is then used to inform the detailed planning of teaching and learning. This is hampering the efforts of some departments to raise standards further. A system of academic tutoring has been introduced through which personal targets are set for pupils. This represents a positive step in addressing a weakness that was identified as a key issue in the last inspection of the school.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

36. Completed questionnaires, letters from parents and the views expressed at the parents' evening demonstrate that the great majority of parents are supportive of the school. Most parents feel that their children are making good progress and they expect them to achieve well. They express confidence in the leadership and management of the school. Most feel comfortable in approaching the school with enquiries or problems. Parents feel that teachers know the pupils well and that there is a good balance between academic work and extra-curricular activities. However, about 20% of the parents who responded to the questionnaire feel that they are not well informed about how their child is getting on and that the school does not work closely enough with them. Inspection evidence suggests that links with parents are effective overall. Nevertheless, a significant number of parents feel that this is an area in need of improvement.
37. The school regularly provides clear and detailed information for parents. The prospectus is informative and is supplemented by helpful curriculum guides for each year group which set out the work to be covered and the amount of homework to be set during the year. The annual report on each pupil's progress is detailed and informative. Parents attend a parents' evening once a year. In addition, they receive ongoing information in the form of half-termly grades for each subject. The 'contact book' is a well used and effective means of communication between the school and parents. Tutors monitor its use regularly and pupils are expected to write their homework tasks in it. The support parents give to the completion and monitoring of homework is significant and has a beneficial effect on attainment.
38. Parents support the work of the school by fundraising through the highly active Parents and Staff Association. The hard work and determination of this group raises the profile of the school within the community. The significant funds raised are thoughtfully used to enrich the life of the school. A number of placements for work experience is offered through parental contacts.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

39. The headteacher provides excellent leadership for the school in partnership with an active and effective governing body. They have ensured that the school makes a distinctive and highly effective contribution to the education of the young people of its immediate neighbourhood. The headteacher is supported by an efficient and very effective group of senior managers who are strongly committed to continuous improvement. The rapid rate of improvement since the last inspection is directly attributable to the well co-ordinated efforts of the deputy headteachers, the heads of faculty, the directors of study and the heads of department. The school's distinction lies in its capacity to take pupils of all abilities and aptitudes and to ensure that they make good progress. This applies equally to pupils with high intellectual ability, who do as well here as they would in any school, and to those with strong practical skills and interests. The capacity to do well by pupils of all levels is based on a coherent set of explicit aims and values, exemplified in attitudes, behaviour and a sense of common purpose. The aims of the school are clearly presented in the well produced brochure, a helpful staff handbook and a comprehensive set of school policies.
40. The quality of planning is high. The school development plan is based on priorities derived from an effective consultative process. A clear and helpful distinction is drawn between development and maintenance functions. All plans are properly and realistically costed and identify personnel who are to take on clear tasks. Targets are

appropriate and are supported by the necessary action. Faculties and departments only receive development funding if they demonstrate how they will contribute to the school's overall priorities. The current priorities, and the related action plans, are wholly appropriate to the current position of the school. A particularly significant feature of the management arrangements is the way in which the role of director of studies successfully links academic and pastoral aims and objectives, reflecting the school's intention of dealing with the whole child. There is a shared commitment to improvement and a capacity to succeed amongst the senior managers, which is effectively communicated to teaching and non-teaching staff.

41. The arrangements for the monitoring and evaluation of the school's progress are strong in most respects. There is a rigorous programme of regular reviews of the work of faculties and of progress on specific themes and aspects of the school's work by the senior management team. However, systematic and regular involvement in classroom observation and critical reflection on the quality of teaching and learning does not extend across a sufficiently large number of heads of department or teaching staff. Given the rapid rate of improvement in recent years the current approaches to teaching and learning are clearly serving the school well. Nonetheless, heads of department would be well advised to ensure that all their staff are fully involved in the analysis and evaluation of existing methods to ensure that the needs of all pupils are met in full and to prepare the ground for successful change and innovation in teaching methods where necessary.
42. The governing body is particularly effective. It meets regularly and keeps in touch with the school's life and progress through its various committees. Governors are knowledgeable, keep themselves in touch with recent education developments and make a significant contribution to the development of the school. A strong feature of their work is their insistence on receiving regular and detailed reports from departments whose performance is either falling or is too low in relation to the performance of others. This insistence on the direct monitoring of performance has made a major contribution to improvement. Governors have a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and they work well in partnership with the headteacher and senior managers.
43. Financial management is very good. The business manager, in close co-operation with the chair of the governors' finance committee, carefully monitors the school's budget. There is effective financial control and administration. The recommendations of the most recent financial audit were very small in number and they have been acted upon. Budget planning follows a clearly defined sequence, giving plenty of time for consideration of priorities and for ensuring that priorities are properly supported. The principles of best value are applied rigorously in the school's use of resources. The school is enterprising in ensuring that fair competition is ensured in the purchase of services. It actively challenges itself to justify its use of resources for particular purposes. Effective use is made of new technologies including ICT in the organisation and administration of the school.
44. The school is well staffed. The qualifications and experience of teachers and support staff match the demands of the curriculum well. The high quality of staff's specialist subject knowledge is particularly helpful to the progress of students at GCSE and A level. There are sufficient skilled support staff to enable the school to function effectively. The induction of staff new to the school is well organised and effective. There is a sensible approach to performance review. The provision of in-service training, particularly on whole school issues, has strengthened considerably in recent years.

45. The quality of the accommodation is generally high with a number of excellent purpose-built features. The assembly hall is magnificent and is well used both in and out of school hours. The school library is lively and inviting and is put to good and effective use. Given the rapid growth of the school, particularly in the sixth form, the accommodation is used to the very limits of its capacity and therefore in a highly efficient manner.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

46. The key area of improvement which should form the basis of the governors' post-inspection action plan is to ensure that much greater use is made of the existing assessment data, by departmental teaching teams, to inform their curriculum planning and teaching.

Other matters requiring attention include:

- broadening teachers' repertoire of teaching strategies so that the learning needs of the school's lowest attaining pupils are met in full;
- creating additional opportunities at Key Stage 3 for pupils to use ICT to support their work across the curriculum.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

248

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

47

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2%	15%	38%	41%	4%	0%	0%

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1,298	364
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	72	-

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	51	4
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	202	15

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	27

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	25
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	48

Attendance

Authorised absence	%	Unauthorised absence	%
School data	7.83%	School data	0.71%
National comparative data	7.9%	National comparative data	1.1%

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2000	129	128	257

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	92	110	103
	Girls	106	101	96
	Total	198	211	199
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	77 (85)	82 (76)	77 (71)
	National	63 (64)	65 (62)	59 (54)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	39 (52)	55 (51)	38 (40)
	National	28 (28)	41 (38)	29 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	93	104	88
	Girls	110	100	88
	Total	203	204	176
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	79 (82)	79 (77)	69 (82)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	45 (31)	52 (52)	45 (46)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	30 (28)

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

National data for 2000 from DfEE Statistical First Release SFR/2000

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	2000	138	114	252

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* - C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	93	134	136
	Girls	88	108	111
	Total	181	242	247
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	72 (64)	98 (96)	100 (98)
	National	49 (47)	89 (91)	94 (94)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	49 (46)
	National	39 (38)

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

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	153	130	283

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	22.3	19.9	21.3	3.7	4.3	3.9
National			18.0			

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	22	82%
	National		

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	6
Black – other	3
Indian	8
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	5
Chinese	3
White	1,291
Any other minority ethnic group	10

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	---	---
Black – African heritage	1	---
Black – other	---	---
Indian	---	---
Pakistani	---	---
Bangladeshi	---	---
Chinese	---	---
White	62	2
Other minority ethnic groups	---	---

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

Teachers and classes**Qualified teachers and classes: Y11 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	99.6
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.7

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	30
Total aggregate hours worked per week	609

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.2
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24.6
Key Stage 4	22.0

Financial information

Financial year	1999/ 2000
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	£
Total income	4,142,953
Total expenditure	4,168,471
Expenditure per pupil	2,508
Balance brought forward from previous year	110,209
Balance carried forward to next year	84,691

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1662
Number of questionnaires returned	446

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	35	54	9	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	35	55	5	-	5
Behaviour in the school is good.	27	60	7	1	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	59	16	3	2
The teaching is good.	21	70	2	-	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	21	49	19	3	8
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	38	52	6	1	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	54	44	0.2	0.4	2
The school works closely with parents.	18	49	19	3	10
The school is well led and managed.	37	51	5	0.5	6
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	35	55	5	0.5	6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	33	46	8	1	12

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

The vast majority of written responses were supportive and reflected the returns shown in the table above.

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

ENGLISH

47. Standards in English are well above average. In last summer's national tests pupils at age 14 attained well above the standards expected nationally. Reading is an important strength. Most pupils have a good grasp of the challenging texts which they are studying. The teaching ensures that the great majority of pupils develop good comprehension skills. Most pupils respond positively to the department's encouragement to read regularly and widely. In their oral work, most pupils support their responses well with evidence from the texts they are studying. By the end of Key Stage 3 most pupils' reading skills are very well established, which provides a solid foundation for GCSE.
48. At Key Stage 4 standards are very high. The school is doing very well in getting a high proportion of candidates to at least a grade C at GCSE in English language, with an above average proportion gaining the higher grades. Performance in GCSE English Literature is also very high. Pupils in all sets are very well prepared for the examination requirements. Most pupils demonstrate a good understanding of the texts they are studying. Their close reading skills are a strength. Many express themselves confidently and articulately when speaking about their work. Much of the writing is of a good standard with some excellent work seen in the top sets, particularly coursework pieces.
49. Performance in A level English Literature is consistently high, with a good proportion of candidates achieving high grades and a 100% pass rate in most years. Students are gaining a thorough grasp of the qualities required for an A level literary essay. Work is well organised, well argued and well supported by textual evidence. Some of the written pieces are of a high standard. They are perceptive and carefully argued.
50. In the context of this high attainment, the only significant weakness for a number of pupils, mainly but not exclusively in Key Stage 3, is in the accuracy of their writing, particularly their spelling and sentence demarcation. Some pupils do not present their work as carefully as they might and this contributes to some of the errors. This is particularly an issue for those pupils who still need to secure competence in basic spelling and punctuation when they begin secondary school.
51. The English department has made significant improvements since the last inspection. Standards have risen, most dramatically and significantly in GCSE. In the latest examinations just over 80% of the entry gained a grade C or above in GCSE English. The last report commented that girls do better than boys in public examinations. Whilst this is still the case, boys do perform very well in English. At GCSE and in the Key Stage 3 tests boys are performing well above the national average for boys. The only significant criticism of the last inspection was that pupils could achieve more in relation to their ability in speaking and listening. The department has ensured that pupils are given planned opportunities to prepare oral tasks and to speak to an audience. During the week of the inspection, pupils responded to these tasks very well.
52. The teaching of A level and GCSE is a strength. Some of the teaching is very good. Teachers' subject knowledge is a key strength. Pupils are very well prepared for public examinations. Senior members of the department provide a strong lead.

Pupils are given thorough teaching in the skills of critical and close reading of the text, supporting arguments with evidence and the structure and features of different types of writing. Expectations are high. Another strength of the teaching is the central importance given to working with challenging literature with all groups of pupils. Pupils respond very well to the texts chosen for study. The overall teaching in Key Stage 3 is sound. Pupils benefit from the high expectations which teachers show in their choice of texts and in the attention given to helping pupils to develop habits of careful and critical reading. The department needs to ensure that lower attaining pupils consolidate the basic skills of spelling, sentence demarcation and handwriting while continuing to have access to high quality texts. In nearly all English lessons pupils are well managed and relationships are good. Teachers ensure a positive working atmosphere. Most pupils respond very well to the teaching. They listen carefully to the teacher and to each other; they concentrate and work productively individually and with others. This contributes to the good progress which they make.

53. The department is well led and managed. The head of faculty is well supported by senior staff who provide a strong and clear direction to the work of the department. It is a considerable achievement on their part to have continued to raise standards and to expand sixth form provision throughout a period of significant staffing changes. Curricular guidance for A level and GCSE is very good: it is sharply focused on teaching the most important skills. Good systems for monitoring and tracking pupils' progress are in place. Better use could be made of assessment data to plan future learning.
54. The department has started to lead work on the development of the teaching of literacy across the curriculum. A good action plan has been drawn up. The development of consistent approaches to supporting literacy in all subjects across the school should help the relatively small proportion of pupils whose standard of written accuracy is hampering their attainment.

MATHEMATICS

55. Standards in mathematics are very good. National test results and teacher assessments show that attainment of pupils at age 14 is well above the national average. In 1999 76% of pupils attained at level 5 or above. In 2000 this figure increased to 82%, compared with national results of 62% and 65% respectively. In both years the proportion of pupils gaining level 6 was also well above the national average. Pupils also attain well above the national average when compared with the attainment of schools with a similar intake.
56. Over time performance at GCSE has been increasingly well above the national average. In 1999 the proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades was 62% compared with a national figure of 48%. In 2000 the proportion increased to 66%, against a national figure of 49%. Almost 50% of pupils attained grade B or above. The percentage of pupils gaining an A* to G grade at GCSE was also well above the national average.
57. At A level mathematics results are also very good. Students consistently perform above the national average. 70% of pupils achieve the higher A level grades and last summer all those entered for the examination passed.
58. Inspection evidence confirms that standards are very good. At Key Stage 3 pupils' ability to use and apply mathematics is well developed at all attainment levels. By

Year 9 higher attaining pupils show a good understanding of the application of geometry to space and location and work confidently with indices, brackets and fractions. Middle set pupils handle flow charts well and understand reflective and rotational symmetry. Pupils in the lower sets are able to read a range of decimal scales confidently and work well applying simple formulae and solving problems involving division and decimals.

59. In Year 11 a substantial majority of pupils are on course to achieve at least a grade C at GCSE, with many working at a higher level. For example, higher attainers cope well with three-dimensional geometry. They solve quadratic equations using a range of methods and know the graphical representations of cubic, quadratic and reciprocal functions. Lower attaining pupils cope well with work on percentages. Pupils at all levels are able to use and apply their knowledge well to coursework tasks, with many producing work of a very good standard.
60. Standards in algebra are good with many pupils within the lower attaining groups showing a good understanding of basic algebraic principles. For example, they use inverse operations appropriately to solve equations and represent relationships using algebraic formulae. Pupils have a good understanding of the number system and place value. They know what calculations are needed to solve a given problem and are confident in carrying these out using written or calculator methods. Standards in mental and oral work are less secure, particularly among older pupils. Pupils would benefit from more opportunities to develop mental strategies and to make decisions about the most efficient calculating methods for solving a given problem.
61. There has been a number of improvements in standards and provision since the last inspection. Standards in Key Stage 4 have risen and are now well above national averages. The criteria used for marking completed work are helpful and are understood by pupils. Procedures for day-to-day assessment of pupils' progress are consistent and linked to the National Curriculum programme of study. The department has put in place a systematic approach to helping pupils to develop their skills in using and applying mathematics, and standards in this area are good. However, opportunities for pupils to develop and apply their skills using computers continue to be limited.
62. During the week of the inspection the quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in all lessons. In Key Stage 3 more than half the lessons seen were good or very good. Good teaching was also seen in Key Stage 4 and at A level. The teaching of mathematics has a number of strengths, many of which were observed in a high proportion of lessons across all key stages. Throughout the department teachers manage pupils well and insist on high standards of behaviour. In particular, pupils who may represent a challenge in terms of motivation and behaviour are encouraged and supported by their teachers so that they remain involved and make good progress. Homework is used effectively to reinforce or extend what is learned in school and often to assess pupils' progress and understanding. Nearly all teachers know their subject well and many use this understanding effectively to link new concepts with what pupils already know. Lessons are usually well structured and teachers use a range of strategies so that pupils maintain their interest and sustain concentration. Most lessons are well paced. Some teachers make very good use of questions to move lessons forward, especially at Key Stage 3. In a number of lessons, however, there are too few opportunities for pupils to ask questions or discuss ideas. Often there is insufficient emphasis on pupils' developing good mental calculating skills and in some lessons teachers do not require pupils to know and use the full range of appropriate mathematical language needed. In lessons at Key Stage 3 where pupils

are working individually, the key learning points are not always sufficiently clear and some pupils are not always sufficiently challenged.

63. The planned curriculum is good and ensures that all pupils are given opportunities to achieve. Appropriate assessment arrangements have been established but the information generated does not always inform future planning. The department is well organised and led. The department has already begun to address those areas of its work which are in need of development.

SCIENCE

64. Standards in science are good. The proportion of pupils attaining level 5 or above at Key Stage 3 rose from 71% to 77% in last summer's national examinations. These results place the school well above the national average. The proportion of pupils attaining level 6 is also well above the national average. Attainment at Key Stage 4 also rose last summer so that 62 % of pupils gained an A* to C grade at GCSE in science, which was well above the national standard. Whilst performance at GCSE has fluctuated in recent years, the science department has performed consistently above the national average. Performance at A level is also above the national average. When compared to schools with a similar intake, standards are high across the age range.
65. By Year 9 most pupils demonstrate a good level of knowledge across the full range of the science programme of study. For example, pupils have good knowledge of the primary colours, nutrients in food and the properties of metals and their reactions with oxygen. They have acquired a good range of investigative skills. By Year 11 most pupils in the higher attaining groups show a very good knowledge and understanding of a wide range of scientific ideas. For example, their understanding of balanced forces, force-pairs, functions of a catalyst and factors affecting rate of reaction is very good. Their experimental skills are very well developed. Pupils' graphical presentation of results and their ability to carry out appropriate calculations are strengths. Some can talk confidently about their knowledge of science and ask deeper questions. In Year 13 the standard of work in all A level lessons is high and the range of science covered is very good. Experimental skills, the ability to carry out relevant calculations, problem-solving skills and the ability to research a given question are strengths.
66. The department has made significant progress since the last inspection. It now provides more opportunities for pupils to carry out challenging investigations. It is better placed to match national curriculum related activities to the prior attainment of pupils. The department provides more opportunities for pupils to talk about and explain their observations and scientific knowledge. It has made less progress in encouraging and helping pupils to do so using appropriate subject-specific vocabulary. The use of information technology remains underdeveloped.
67. Teaching is of a good standard. It is often very good in the higher attaining groups and at A level. Teaching is often less effective in the middle and lower attaining groups, especially at Key Stage 4. Expectations of high attaining pupils are high but could in the middle and lower attaining teaching groups be higher. Teachers' subject knowledge is a strength. Classes are managed very well. Teachers ask searching questions and provide informative notes. The quality of pupils' writing is good. Marking is thorough and homework is used effectively to support learning. Information from ongoing assessments does not sufficiently inform teaching. Lesson objectives often focus on what the pupils will do rather than on what they are expected to learn. Some

of the writing in lessons is routine and unnecessary. Overall, however, the teaching is of sufficient quality to secure good learning in most lessons. Pupils' own efforts and application, both in lessons and in the completion of their homework, contribute significantly to their learning and progress. The majority of pupils respond positively to science lessons. Most behave well and are keen to learn. In practical lessons they share resources well and work methodically and safely.

68. The department is very well organised and is well led. The science curriculum is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. Teacher assessments do not always provide a reliable measure of the attainment levels reached in the national curriculum, especially by those pupils in the middle attaining teaching groups. This is problematic when allocating pupils to the tiered papers in Key Stage 4. More reliable assessment arrangements would also enable the department to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses in its learning resources and teaching. The department makes effective use of its good resources. There is good access to books and dictionaries and satisfactory access to computers. The number and qualifications of the teaching team are appropriate. The department is, however, understaffed in terms of technical support.

ART

69. As pupils move up through the school the standards they attain improve. By the end of Key Stage 3 levels of achievement are at the standards expected nationally. Standards achieved at Key Stage 4 are above the national average and are very high at A level.
70. At Key Stage 3 pupils can use an appropriate range of skills and knowledge in creating both two and three-dimensional art. They are able to draw on a number of techniques to create images, including collage, photomontage and a range of painting techniques. Standards in drawing are less well developed. Pupils do not acquire a sufficiently broad range of basic drawing skills by the end of Year 9. Pupils participate well in critical discussions and make good use of subject-specific vocabulary. This is an improvement since the last inspection. The pupils' management of tools and materials is good. They set out their workspaces and equipment efficiently and make a positive contribution to the pace and momentum of the lessons.
71. The standard of work at Key Stage 4 is good. The percentage of pupils gaining an A* to C grade at GCSE has increased in recent years and was well above the national average in last summer's examinations. Pupils confidently explore individual ideas. Although drawing skills are not strong the pupils do have strategies for developing their work through a range of creative channels. They know about and make regular use of the work of other artists. At GCSE and A level pupils' knowledge of critical and historical studies was rudimentary in the last inspection. This is now a strong feature of the teaching and learning and has strengthened the quality of pupils' practical and research work. By the time they reach the end of Key Stage 4 pupils have well established critical skills.
72. Standards at A level are very high. Students achieve excellent examination results. The number of students participating in this course is small but growing. Students bring a range of skills to their artwork including darkroom skills, three dimensional construction skills and fabric construction skills. Used in combination these skills can secure work of very high quality. A level students are highly articulate about their own and others' work. They have excellent critical review and discussion skills. They are

able to offer extended ideas and draw upon a good knowledge of art when interpreting work.

73. The department has improved significantly since the last inspection. Three-dimensional work now features strongly in all key stages. Pupils use techniques such as clay, plaster, wire frame and card construction, as well as techniques for constructing sculptures incorporating ready-made resources. Standards in drawing are still, however, not strong at either GCSE or A level. This leads to an over-reliance on secondary sources as starting points for projects.
74. The quality of teaching is good or better in most lessons. No unsatisfactory teaching of art was seen during the week of the inspection. There is a systematic approach to planning which ensures parity of experience and learning across all teaching groups. Teaching at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. Class discussions are well led. Teachers ensure key terminology is embedded in their expositions and in their dialogue with pupils. Class management is invariably good. Good use is made of pupils' work to exemplify key learning points. Lessons regularly start with a definition or re-definition of the task so that pupils are focused on their work. Many lessons at Key Stage 3 focus on the mechanical and routine processes, often at the expense of developing aesthetic awareness and artistic knowledge. There is a systematic approach to the practical organisation of equipment and materials. Homework is marked regularly. Marking is usually helpful and offers specific advice on what pupils should do in order to improve. Teachers effectively support pupils with special needs. Tasks are restructured or simplified for particular pupils who need different starting points or shorter-term goals.
75. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form particularly good planning and teaching ensures that pupils operate within the examination structure and timescales, whilst permitting a sense of open development for pupils' own work. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and a clear understanding of the requirements of the examinations. Examination coursework is planned well and relates directly to the demands of the GCSE assessment structure and overall time schedules of the course. Teachers provide specific instructions for the organisation and layout of work. Teachers plan an excellent schedule of work insisting on high work rates and strict deadlines for completion of work in both GCSE and A level classes. Pupils are imbued with a confidence in their own individual work and ideas.
76. Pupils enjoy this subject and the behaviour of the large majority is very good. Many take advantage of the after-school and lunchtime clubs and workshops provided by the department. The department is led well. The team approach to planning and development works well. Visual resources for art are not well developed in some important areas. In a number of lessons teachers resort to holding up a book for a large class of pupils to see. This is not an efficient means of illustration for a visual subject. Similarly, the department has too few visual resources to support first-hand observational drawing and painting. There is also a general weakness in information technology related work.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

77. At Key Stage 3, pupils are attaining good standards. A well taught, comprehensive curriculum enables the majority to develop practical skills confidently and to gain the expected knowledge in all areas of the faculty by the end of Year 9. At Key Stage 4, results across the faculty have improved steadily. With the exception of graphic products, results now exceed the national average in all examination courses. Performance at GCSE in these courses varied last summer between 61% and 76% of pupils attaining at grades *A to C. Work in textiles, resistant materials and in food is consistently good. In child development, students take the personal study seriously and work to high standards of planning, investigation and recorded work. In graphics, however, too much time is allocated to enquiries which are unlikely to contribute in any significant way to success in the final examination. Standards at A level vary too much. The AS level students in the lower sixth are working to good standards in their emerging design and prototyping skills. They are systematically learning to use powerful computer-aided design software to a good standard. Students in the upper sixth form are not working quickly enough to pursue clearly defined major projects. They are not gaining higher-order technical understanding and applying it to extended study.
78. The faculty has made substantial progress since the last inspection. New workshops are now well established. There is a coherent curriculum, which develops the skills and knowledge associated with resistant materials. Important changes have been made at Key Stage 4 which enable students to develop higher level skills early in Year 10. The quality of pupils' learning has improved along with their understanding of quality and design decisions concerning materials. Teaching is of a higher standard than previously found. Teaching at A level, while improved, is still patchy in terms of ensuring a suitable rate of progress and technical depth. Limited access to ICT resources in the faculty means that this area remains weak.
79. Good teaching is widespread throughout the faculty and never falls below satisfactory. Teachers know their subject well. They systematically increase children's technical understanding, while broadening the range of creative opportunities they provide. Demonstration and individual support are skilfully used to communicate a clear understanding of what counts as good and finished work. Pupils are motivated by the teaching to strive for high standards in all areas of the faculty. A clear structure enables teachers to accurately anticipate problems and to help pupils to succeed. Too few teachers have, however, developed good oral working which challenges pupils and moves the learning forward. Whilst most teachers ask questions, discussion usually seeks merely to confirm what is known. Teaching at A level is too variable. The lower sixth form AS course is taught well. Students are set tasks which require immediate design responses. Students are held accountable for their responses and are set challenging deadlines. However, A level students need to be pressed harder if they are to take technically demanding steps with their major project work.
80. Students respond well to the subject, regardless of age. They are courteous and motivated. Pupils are willing to listen and consider what is said. Students in older classes show a very mature attitude to work. They demonstrate a keen interest in their ideas and are confident enough to communicate well. This attitude contributes positively to the quality of learning.

81. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 provides a wide range of well conceived and planned experiences which enable specialist teachers to teach well. Creative understanding and challenge always accompany systematic technical development. The faculty is seeking to improve standards at Key Stage 3 by more accurately matching the work to pupils' prior attainment at Key Stage 2. This initiative already shows promise. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 helpfully places emphasis on establishing an understanding of accuracy and quality finish within demanding design problems. The faculty has made a high priority of explaining the demands of the examination boards to the students. The application of information technology is well planned within the limitations of the resources available in specialist areas. Leadership of the faculty is not conspicuous but is effective in providing the direction and principles by which the faculty operates. The limited time allocated to detailed discussion and INSET means that leadership is not always focused on monitoring and spreading the best teaching practice. Heads of individual departments enjoy an appropriate degree of autonomy. General organisation and technical support is of a high order. With the exception of ICT at the point of need, the departments are well resourced. Accommodation is good and thoughtfully developed into an environment in which children and their ideas thrive. Pupils work in a safe environment.

DRAMA

82. Overall, standards of attainment in drama are very good, although they are better at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3. GCSE examination results are consistently well above the national average and are well above the school average. As they progress from Year 7 to Year 11, pupils acquire a range of techniques and performance styles that they can use and apply with skill and confidence. The fundamental skills required for drama are established at the start of Year 7 and maintained and developed as pupils move through Key Stages 3 and 4. Pupils are able to co-operate and negotiate and work with individual and collective self-discipline. Particularly notable is their ability to evaluate and reflect on their work and offer constructive criticism to each other. By the end of Key Stage 3, most pupils perform without self-consciousness, speaking clearly and confidently, in both scripted and improvised work. They understand the differences between spontaneous and prepared improvisation. Many pupils create characters different from themselves, although pupils do not consistently apply their mime and physical characterisation skills when speaking in role. Although most pupils can structure a scene clearly, others do not consistently take the audience's needs into account when showing work. By the end of KS4 pupils have a good grasp of technical vocabulary. They understand the importance of spatial relationships, dramatic tension, gesture, stance and eye contact. Most are able to structure, edit and select in order to create effective and powerful drama.
83. At the time of the last inspection drama was acknowledged as a strength of the school. This position has been consolidated. The department has ensured that greater numbers select GCSE drama and A level performing arts and succeeded in increasing the number of boys that opt for the latter. The range of extra-curricular activities remains outstanding and makes a major contribution to pupils' social and cultural development, as well as supporting their attainment within the curriculum. Pupils are able to participate in school productions and presentations of devised work. They are offered opportunities to attend a wide range of theatre productions.
84. Overall, teaching is very good although there are some variations within each key stage. The best teaching is outstanding, balancing structure and guidance with opportunities for pupils to progress by applying the skills they learn independently and

creatively. Relationships between teachers and pupils are consistently positive. The assumption is that everyone can and will participate and succeed, regardless of ability. A well planned curriculum focuses on developing drama skills and uses written work well to support pupils' understanding. Pupils make best and most consistent progress when the pace of lessons is kept brisk, when the teacher's introduction is kept to a minimum and when lessons are structured to ensure that the central aim is clearly developed and understood by all pupils. To support this, there is a need to review and develop assessment at Key Stage 3 and to focus written tasks to support pupils' progress.

85. The department is very well managed and appropriately staffed by a team of supportive and hard working teachers. The department is very well resourced. However, the accommodation is unsatisfactory. Although the theatre is an excellent teaching space, the assembly hall and the dining hall are not. Staff rotate rooms to ensure that this disadvantages no single group. The use of sixth form pupils as classroom assistants makes a good contribution to both older and younger pupils' social development.

GEOGRAPHY

86. Attainment in geography is good. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above national expectations. For example, the highest attaining pupils in Year 9 used maps, texts and photographs independently to write a description of threats to the tropical rainforest. Year 7 pupils applied mapping skills to an enquiry into settlement hierarchy. Pupils' skills in investigative or explanatory work are less well developed than their descriptive skills. Attainment at Key Stage 4 is very good. At GCSE the percentage of pupils achieving grades of A* to C is well above the average achieved in schools nationally and the score on relative ratings is higher than most other subjects in the school. At the time of the last inspection 53% of pupils attained at A* to C in GCSE. The percentage has risen steadily year on year to reach 77% in 2000. High standards in coursework contribute significantly to these results. Current Key Stage 4 pupils are on target to achieve similar high results. At A level attainment is above national standards. The percentage achieving A to C has risen consistently from 30% in 1996 with 10 students to 65% in 2000 with 17 students. The department has secured a 100% pass rate over the last three years. Geography is now a very popular subject at A level with 35 pupils currently following the course in Year 12.
87. The geography department has made good progress since the last inspection and very good progress in raising attainment. Departmental documentation directs teachers to give more opportunities for extended writing. This is most clearly seen in Key Stage 4. Most teaching now actively involves all pupils through targeted questioning around the class. Such questioning gives a clearer assessment of pupils' understanding to help in short term planning.
88. Teaching in geography is good. At Key Stage 4 most teaching is very good; at Key Stage 3 it is broadly satisfactory but less effective in some lower attaining teaching groups where objectives and teaching strategies are weaker. Marking is detailed and diagnostic throughout all key stages. Teachers have good subject knowledge. At Key Stage 4 lessons are helpfully focused on examination requirements. For example, pupils are made to use subject specific terminology, named examples and statistical evidence to support their answers. Case studies are clear and detailed and so support effective revision. In the best lessons very good questioning challenges pupils to think. Teachers use pupils' work effectively to share good points with the rest of the

class. For example, completed homework on rainforest products generated interesting ideas at the start of a Year 9 lesson. In most lessons the board is not used enough for noting key words and drawing simple diagrams to clarify understanding. In several classes the planning is highly task orientated with little emphasis on explicit learning objectives. Some tasks are low level, often but not always in lower sets, requiring only short answers. As a result, in these lessons pupils' learning is not fully developed. Most pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress across the key stages and very good progress in Key Stage 4. In almost all lessons pupils behave very well. Very good relationships exist amongst the pupils and between pupils and their teachers. Many pupils remain, however, passively compliant, needing prompting from the teacher to play an active part in the lesson.

89. The head of department provides very good leadership. Enquiry approaches are being promoted to ensure pupils are challenged to think. Good practice seen in lesson observations is now shared across the faculty. Exercise books and lesson planners are effectively monitored. Targets are especially well used and shared with pupils in Key Stage 4 to ensure they know the standards they are achieving and how to improve. Key Stage 3 planning is weaker. It lacks explicit learning objectives and would benefit from taking greater account of assessment data. High standards of accommodation have a positive effect on learning but rooms lack blackouts. ICT is rarely used in lessons to enhance learning but other resources, especially video clips and display maps, are used very effectively.

HISTORY

90. Standards of work in history are good. By the age of 14 the work of most pupils is in line with national expectations and well above this level for the highest attainers. Most pupils have a sound understanding of the key features of historical periods and can select information appropriately to answer historical enquiries. In one class, for example, pupils were able to explain clearly and in detail how rural workers were affected by the development of machinery during the industrial revolution. Most pupils can make sound interpretations using historical sources, for example to find out about the working conditions for children in factories. The highest attainers are able to produce clear, well-sequenced descriptions and explanations, often in extended form. Most pupils in the lower attaining groups have a sound understanding of key historical information. More needs to be done, however, to teach these pupils the necessary techniques and vocabulary to make extended arguments independently.
91. By the age of 16 attainment is well above the average nationally. At the last inspection, weaknesses were identified at this level. A considerable improvement in GCSE results has since been made and the evidence of this inspection is that these improvements have been sustained. GCSE students have good recall of the main events and background detail of the periods they are studying. They use this information well to produce thoughtful accounts which demonstrate a good understanding of political and social conditions. One Year 11 class, for example, was able to show a clear appreciation of the difficulties facing journalists in South Africa during apartheid. GCSE students, of all abilities, have a sound understanding of the techniques necessary for success in the examination. Most higher attainers know how to evaluate source material systematically. Many lower attainers, although less fluent and accurate, are nevertheless able to produce work close to the required standard.

92. Examination results at A level, during the past two years, have been in line with the national average. Standards seen during the inspection, however, were good. In lessons, sixth formers show a thorough grasp of the topics covered and use historical concepts and vocabulary with confidence. In analysing Stalin's speeches, for example, upper sixth students were able to identify references to a wide range of leading characters and personalities in the Communist Party. Throughout the school, in the significant majority of classes, pupils show a good attitude towards their history lessons and approach their work purposefully.
93. The teaching of history is good. In the last inspection, weaknesses were identified in the quality of learning and the pace of lessons. The evidence of this inspection is that significant improvements have been made in both these areas. Teachers' subject knowledge is a particular strength. This is used to good effect in providing focused introductions, clear explanations and additional information which help to strengthen pupils' interest in the topics. Teachers have a clear understanding of the requirements of GCSE and A level syllabi and use this well to help prepare students for examinations. Most lessons are well structured with activities designed to develop a wide range of historical skills. A strength of the teaching is the amount of extended talk and discussion which takes place in a majority of the lessons. Teachers generally manage their classes well and ensure a good working atmosphere. This helps pupils to make presentations and ask and answer questions with confidence. Most lessons end with an appropriate period of reinforcement of the learning and homework generally builds appropriately on work covered in class. Expectations of behaviour and pupil participation are high. More could be done in Key Stage 3 lessons, however, to clarify expectations of the standard, depth and detail of the written work to be completed. In lessons with lower-attaining groups, more could be done to ensure that pupils fully understand key features of the historical period before they are set to work on independent tasks.
94. The history curriculum is well planned and provides good opportunities for pupils to develop the full range of historical skills. It is appropriately enhanced by field trips and visits both locally and abroad.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

95. At Key Stage 3 standards in ICT are below those expected nationally. Standards in Year 7 are satisfactory but decline towards the end of the key stage. Pupils make good use of the internet to search for information. They are confident and competent in the use of general purpose software packages such as word processing, presentation graphics and spreadsheets. Knowledge and understanding of underlying ICT systems are weak. Standards in ICT improve at Key Stage 4 and are in line with national expectations for the subject. Results in the summer GCSE short course examinations were good and a considerable improvement on the year before. Standards are satisfactory in vocational ICT courses in the sixth form but A level performance is low compared to achievements in other subjects.
96. The school has made significant progress in addressing the weakness in ICT provision identified in the previous inspection. There is now a guaranteed entitlement to taught ICT courses for all pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4. At Key Stage 4 all pupils are able to follow the GCSE short course and some pupils are given the opportunity to follow the full course, although no additional time is available for the latter. However, in the absence of a consistent policy for pupils to develop ICT knowledge and skills

across the curriculum at Key Stage 3, there is too little time for pupils to reach the standards expected.

97. In almost all cases the quality of teaching is satisfactory or better and this results in steady and sustained progress for all pupils. Teachers' subject knowledge is good. Excellent time management of coursework and close attention to the requirements of the syllabus helps secure good standards at Key Stage 4. Lesson objectives are made clear to pupils. Good relationships are established. However, poor classroom layout has a direct impact on the quality of teaching, making it difficult to engage the whole class and to encourage discussion and debate. Lack of suitable means to demonstrate software to the whole class is also a disadvantage. Insufficient emphasis is placed on the contribution of homework to raising standards.
98. The ICT department is well led and managed and is able to focus on the curriculum rather than the management of resources. Two full-time technical staff undertake the latter. An 'acceptable use policy' for the use of the internet is enforced. In a relatively short time, new ICT courses have been successfully introduced into every year group. This has required a great deal of hard work by everyone concerned. There are still areas for improvement, particularly in the balance at Key Stage 3 between teaching software skills and the underlying knowledge and understanding required to be autonomous users of ICT in a range of problem solving situations. The end of Key Stage 3 teacher assessments are weighted too heavily in favour of the former. The department should address the control and measurement aspects of the ICT programme of study more systematically.
99. During the week of the inspection there was very little evidence of the use of ICT across the curriculum, although several subject schemes of work identify opportunities to do so. In some subjects the use of ICT has declined since the last inspection. This is largely due to the limited access to appropriate resources. During sixth form ICT lessons many computers are left unused and the one computer to one pupil ratio in the ICT rooms may not be the most effective means of deployment in order to address the requirements of the whole school.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

100. Pupils achieve good standards in modern foreign languages in terms of public examination results and other formal tests. At age 16 standards in 1999 and 2000 were well above the average achieved both nationally and by similar schools, although fewer pupils than average attained the two highest grades. Pupils may now take either French or German as a first language. Recent GCSE results in both languages have been especially good given that virtually all pupils were entered. The most recent results in German have been rather better than in French, with entries for both languages on an equal footing. Girls have performed better than boys but the gap is much narrower than usual; the extent to which boys have exceeded their national average standard is noticeably greater than in the case of girls. Over recent years entries for A level in both languages have been few in number, with results of average standard. Sixth form numbers are increasing and these students are reaching a good standard in lessons.
101. In the lessons observed, older pupils were working at a standard in line with the school's recent examination results. They cover a good range of language and most communicate effectively in speech and writing within the standard topics. Pupils in higher and middle attaining classes produce some extended writing of good quality

and use examples of complex language in speaking tasks. Lower attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, are working at or near their capacity and pupils in all sets keep up with the work in hand. Younger pupils are on track to meet national expectations in their first foreign language by age 14: those attaining the higher standards produce written and spoken German or French combining new and known language with a fair degree of accuracy. Pupils perform well in tests and within the context of specific tasks in lessons and most have learnt to talk about themselves at a simple level in French or German. In all ability groups most pupils work well on points of grammar of varying difficulty. Pronunciation is technically sound but lacks an authentic accent. In a few lessons pupils showed initiative in the use of the foreign language and most use glossaries appropriately. Pupils of all ages understand the language used or presented in the specific topic being taught and in test items but in the lessons observed they had little opportunity to read and listen to the foreign language at length.

102. Since the last inspection results at GCSE have improved steadily and significantly. Many of the strengths identified then remain in place. Staff work hard to raise standards further and no unsatisfactory teaching was seen in the current inspection. However, pupils remain generally reluctant or unable to use the foreign language at any length outside the immediate topic and teaching strategies to bring this about are not yet in place.
103. The quality of teaching was at least satisfactory in all lessons and was good in two lessons in five. Sixth form teaching is strong. Teachers work hard for their pupils and their desire to raise standards is self-evident. Most teachers have a sound command of their languages but some are less fluent, especially in German, and do not use them consistently in lessons. As a result, many pupils do not hear the foreign language used spontaneously or at length and their own ability to do so independently remains underdeveloped. Staff do, however, have a full and accurate knowledge of the demands of the curriculum and examinations and use this to pupils' benefit; they make it clear that all pupils are expected to work on core items of language and give good examples of how to do well, especially in the older classes. Most lessons are well planned, though objectives are not always specific enough. In many lessons methods are effective and new language is presented well. Elsewhere the teaching is not focused enough, lacks pace, or relies excessively on text book activities and task or test preparation. Occasionally pupils are set to work on tasks without sufficient guidance or practice, affecting the quality of language they produce. In a few cases undemanding or over-complex activities are used. Teachers expect and usually obtain very high standards of behaviour. Teachers are well organised and in most lessons no time is wasted. Pupils' work is usually carefully marked, though teachers do not always indicate how it can be improved.
104. As a result of the teaching they receive, most pupils at all levels of attainment progress at least satisfactorily in lessons, acquiring new language items and points of grammar and in some cases producing more complex language. In some lessons the progress made is uneven, however. Most pupils have a clear view of their own strengths and weaknesses. They display positive attitudes and a genuine concern to do well. More work on sound-spelling relationships and pronunciation and on extending the range of teaching approaches would raise standards further.
105. The faculty is very well led and organised. There is a strong team ethos and a concern to move forward. The curriculum is well planned and the provision gives a good range of choice from which pupils benefit in terms of attitudes and standards. There is a full programme of visits and exchanges. Classrooms are very well

organised and contain excellent displays of work. The very good assessment arrangements and schemes of work need to be used more directly to inform the way teachers plan and teach, so that the full breadth of the National Curriculum becomes a reality for all pupils. More time now needs to be made available for monitoring and evaluation of the quality, consistency and impact of teaching.

MUSIC

106. Overall, standards in music are good. The majority of pupils are on course to attain the national expectation by the time they are 14. Pupils are making good progress in lessons. For example, in a Year 7 class pupils developed performing, composing, and listening skills through an excellent class performance of a song. Their sense of rhythm was very good and they were able to maintain their own parts with a good awareness of how the different parts fitted together. They are good at evaluating their work, suggesting improvements and developments and using musical terms correctly. Pupils are developing their aural skills well as they progress through Key Stage 3. Year 9 pupils are achieving well and are in line with expectations for this stage in the year. They are developing their ability to improvise through composing variations on a theme and are beginning to improvise with confidence.
107. The most recent GCSE results were well above the national average, with all pupils achieving A* to C grades. Pupils at the start of the GCSE course are achieving above expectations. They demonstrate a good understanding of the musical elements as a basis for the task of setting chosen words to music. The work of Year 11 pupils shows that they make good progress over time.
108. The quality of provision for music has improved since the previous inspection. The majority of points raised in the previous inspection report have been addressed satisfactorily. The quality of teaching has improved and there is now a wider range of approaches to teaching the skills of composing.
109. Teaching is now good overall with very good features in lessons in both key stages. Effective teaching is characterised by very good subject knowledge. There is often a sense of enthusiasm and energy in lessons with teachers conveying their own enjoyment of music. The level of challenge is good. Most lessons are taught at a brisk pace which helps to keep pupils focused with no time to be diverted from the task, although occasionally the fast pace of lessons leaves a few pupils behind. Teachers have a good awareness of when to change the activity, when to intervene and when and how to provide support. 'Counting in' at the beginning of a piece of music is taught effectively from Year 7 and this has a significant impact on pupils' ability to perform successfully in groups. Pupils respond positively to the good teaching, participating fully in lessons and showing interest and a sense of enjoyment, particularly during performances. In the GCSE groups teachers know pupils very well and set appropriate individual targets, monitoring their progress effectively during lessons. There is productive discussion between teachers and pupils and feedback to pupils is constructive and appropriately critical. There is an expectation that pupils will become independent learners. Pupils are very focused, thoughtful and sensitive in their approach to their work. They work well both independently and in collaboration with others.

110. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 meets statutory requirements. There is now an appropriate balance between performing, composing and listening to music. The curriculum is kept under review and the most recent planning takes account of Curriculum 2000. The curriculum is enriched by opportunities for pupils to take part in ensembles such as the wind and jazz bands. However, these involve a relatively small number of pupils and opportunities to be involved in performances could be extended, particularly for the younger pupils. Two hundred pupils have instrumental tuition in a range of instruments. The quality of teaching by instrumental tutors is very good.
111. Music contributes well to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through the strong emphasis on collaborative group work, the encouragement of respect for other peoples' work, sensitive evaluations and the good relationships in many lessons. Provision for pupils' cultural development is good. Pupils are introduced to a wide range of music and are encouraged to listen to and reflect on their responses to it. Year 7 pupils had produced abstract paintings using colour and shape to express their responses to Vivaldi's 'Four Seasons'. In Year 10 pupils chose a very wide variety of poems to set to music, ranging from Shakespeare to twentieth-century poets. Pupils value the social experience of shared music making both in class and in ensembles. They value each other's contributions. Older pupils visit primary schools to demonstrate their instruments, developing their self-confidence and their social and communication skills.
112. The subject is effectively managed. The accommodation and resources are adequate with the exception of one classroom, which is too small for teaching music at Key Stage 3. The range of tuned and untuned percussion instruments could be usefully extended to provide pupils with a greater variety of sounds for their compositions and performances. ICT is a weakness. It is underdeveloped and there is some redundant equipment which gives a negative message to pupils. This aspect of the curriculum has already been highlighted by the department as an area for development.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

113. Standards in physical education are good overall. Standards at Key Stage 3 range from good to satisfactory. By Year 9 pupils have developed a wide range of skills across all activities. A minority do not, however, apply these skills with consistent control, precision or fluency. This is particularly evident in mixed gymnastics lessons. The acquisition and application of invasion games skills are better developed in the single gender groups. Pupils' observation, analysis and feedback skills are being developed but need further improvement. Aspects of health and fitness are covered in Key Stage 3 and are fully in line with national curriculum expectations but some pupils have poorly developed technique. Standards improve at Key Stage 4. The department's examination results are very good and are consistently well above the national average. Learning targets for all examination work are very clear and are thoroughly understood by the vast majority of students. Higher attaining pupils have a conceptual awareness of what they are doing and can apply concepts across different activities.
114. The last inspection highlighted room for improvement in all classes. This is no longer the case. Examination work is constantly being reflected upon and revised. There are still areas of underachievement in Key Stage 3 but these are being addressed. The last report identified a lack of appropriate planning to meet the needs of individual

pupils. To address this criticism, new units of work are being piloted this term. The department remains committed to mixed teaching groups. Whilst having many benefits, this approach needs to be combined with a very clear policy on differentiated tasks within each lesson. The current policy of delivering a unit of work to all groups, irrespective of their learning needs, results in some pupils working at levels that are not appropriate to them. This is particularly evident in mixed gender invasion games where a large number of boys are able to perform at standards above those provided for.

115. Overall the quality of teaching is good. It is at its best in examination classes. All teachers are qualified specialists and have the required knowledge to teach all areas designated to them. Expectations are high in examination classes but could be raised in Year 11 core lessons. Planning for examination work is very effective. Short term planning for Key Stage 3 and core Key Stage 4 lessons lacks explicit learning outcomes. Teaching methods tend to be teacher dominated at Key Stage 3 and at times not enough thought is given to how pupils can take the initiative. Use of time is purposeful and resources are well managed. Assessment arrangements provide helpful and instant feedback. The information gathered through teacher assessments does not, however, inform future teaching, especially at Key Stage 3 and in the core programme at Key Stage 4.
116. The management of the department is effective. All teaching staff are good role models for their pupils. The work of the department is regularly monitored but more emphasis needs to be placed on the evaluation of the teaching and learning. Extra-curricular provision is very good and provides a good environment for extension and enrichment of the department's work.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

117. By the time they are 14, and at the age of 16, pupils are achieving in line with the expectations of the Bromley Agreed Syllabus for RE. Last summer 57% of pupils following the GCSE short course gained an A* to C grade and all pupils gained an A* to G grade. At A level, 90% of pupils gained A to C grades.
118. As they move through Key Stage 3, pupils progressively develop knowledge, understanding and skills. By the time they reach Year 9 they have a good understanding of questions relating to belief in God and are able to explain and give some evaluation of different arguments about the role of God in the creation of the universe. Pupils have produced some very thoughtful extended writing and artwork exploring these questions. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 also demonstrate the capacity to respond at a high level. For example, Year 7 pupils were able to suggest reasons which Jesus might have had for choosing the twelve disciples. Year 8 pupils were able to explain the beliefs and practices relating to the Jewish new year. Standards in the higher attaining GCSE groups are good. Many pupils are articulate and able to formulate and present an argument very effectively. They show good levels of understanding of the complexity of moral and ethical issues such as euthanasia and can explain the impact of beliefs on actions. They often raise thoughtful, relevant questions. However, the lack of motivation and poor behaviour of some pupils in the lowest attaining classes adversely affects the quality of learning and limits progress. At A level standards are at least in line with national expectations. Students show good levels of understanding of theological and philosophical issues. They enjoy tackling complex questions and ideas and make sense of them very quickly. For example, Year 12 students meeting the ideas of Epicurus for the first time were able

to apply them to everyday contexts. Year 13 students have a good grasp of issues which bring science and religion into conflict and can explain different views about the nature of miracles. RE forms part of the sixth form general studies course and students participate well in the exploration of philosophical and ethical questions.

119. Teaching is satisfactory overall. There are good features in lessons in all key stages. Management of pupils is almost always good. Expectations are made clear and teachers reinforce them consistently. The management of pupils in the lowest attaining classes in Key Stage 4 is sometimes unsatisfactory. Lessons are well planned and teachers have good subject knowledge at all levels. Questioning is often good with teachers building effectively on pupils' answers and pushing them further. Pupils respond well to this approach. The best lessons involve pupils in a range of activities at an appropriate level, maintaining their interest and motivation. Where teaching is good teachers build effectively on pupils' responses and use them to enable pupils both to learn about and to learn from religion. However, in some lessons the tasks set are not challenging enough and do not allow pupils to draw on and apply their knowledge and skills at higher levels.
120. Since the last inspection provision for RE has been strengthened by the introduction of a GCSE short course for all pupils in Key Stage 4. The RE curriculum makes a very strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There are frequent opportunities for pupils to explore questions of meaning and purpose in depth and the introduction of the GCSE short course has raised pupils' awareness of the relevance of the subject. During the week of the inspection pupils commented on the value of RE in making them more aware of the views and beliefs of others. The curriculum is enriched by visits to a local church and, for older pupils, visits to Rochester Cathedral, Italy and the National Gallery. Opportunities for visits to places connected with religions other than Christianity should be explored.
121. RE is well managed. The department has responded to the findings of the last inspection and now has procedures in place for the monitoring of teaching and for the assessment of pupils' attainment and progress, including the recent introduction of self-assessment sheets for pupils at all key stages. In practice these processes are at an early stage of implementation but it is essential that the department has clear strategies for the intelligent use of the information they have begun to collect about teaching and learning in order that it will have a positive impact on pupils' attainment and progress. It is a strength of the department that all teachers of RE are specialists. However, opportunities for them to attend appropriate subject specific INSET would be beneficial. The department is adequately resourced. The use of ICT is underdeveloped in RE. Accommodation is good. The specialist teaching rooms are interesting, stimulating learning environments, enhanced by good quality displays which include pupils' work and contribute to the high profile of RE in the school.