

INSPECTION REPORT

KNUTSFORD HIGH SCHOOL

Knutsford

LEA area: Cheshire

Unique reference number: 111427

Headteacher: Mr K Hollins

Reporting inspector: Mrs G Kayembe
2901

Dates of inspection: 27th November – 1st December 2000

Inspection number: 223710
Inspection carried out under Section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Secondary
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Bexton Road Knutsford Cheshire
Postcode:	WA16 0EA
Telephone number:	01565 633294
Fax number:	01565 633796
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs L Wilson
Date of previous inspection:	March, 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mrs G Kayembe 2901	Registered inspector	English as an additional language	The characteristics and effectiveness of the school Key issues The school's results and achievements Teaching and learning
Mr T Heavey 19342	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, behaviour and personal development Pupils' welfare, health and safety Partnership with parents and carers
Ms V Blackburn 27050	Team inspector	Science	
Mr H Davies 13734	Team inspector	Sixth form	Learning opportunities for pupils: curriculum Leadership and management
Mr R Donne 7483	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
Mr R Hancock 2715	Team inspector	English	
Mr V Harrison 17359	Team inspector	Design and technology	Accommodation
Mr J Laver 1085	Team inspector	Physical education	
Mr B Meech 13619	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Ms H Olds 1994	Team inspector	Equal opportunities Geography	Staffing and use of strategic resources
Mr P Quest 10807	Team inspector	Religious education	Learning opportunities for pupils: spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
Mr P Redican 31680	Team inspector	Art and design	Resources
Mr M Roberts 8672	Team inspector	Information and communication technology History	
Mr W Robson 3731	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
Mrs M Young 31660	Team inspector	Music	

The inspection contractor was:

Bench Marque Ltd
National Westminster Bank Chambers
Victoria Street
Burnham on Sea
Somerset
TA8 1AN
Tel: 01278 795022

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The Registrar
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Knutsford is a popular and over subscribed comprehensive school for boys and girls aged between 11 and 18. It is based on two sites, a lower and an upper school site, which are about ten minutes apart. Whilst the majority of the 1473 students currently attending the school are drawn from in and around Knutsford, a significant minority come from the adjacent local education authority of Trafford, which operates a selective system for secondary education. The attainment of students on entry to the school is average although there are fewer with significantly low or high attainment than found nationally. The social and economic circumstances of students are better than average, although the intake is representative of a wide range of backgrounds. The school hosts a special educational needs unit for students with moderate learning difficulties. Currently 36 full-time and eight part-time students make use of it. There are a further 210 students on the school's register of special educational needs. Taking the unit and the school together, the proportion of students with a statement of special educational need is higher than the national average, but the proportion of students with an identified special educational need is broadly similar. The vast majority of students are of white UK heritage. The very few with English as an additional language are competent in its use.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school with many strengths. That each individual student should succeed and perform at his or her best is a key guiding principle underpinning the work of the school. A strong and well-established sense of community promotes a harmonious and supportive environment within which students successfully apply themselves and strive for excellence. Their attitudes to learning are very good. Good quality education, including good teaching, results in effective learning and high standards of academic achievement and personal development. Excellent leadership and management by the headteacher provide a clear steer for the school's development and ensure that all staff are equal stakeholders in the drive for further success. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Consistently good teaching across the school and high expectations of students from staff establish a powerful work ethic in lessons
- An outstandingly clear sense of purpose and very good teamwork ensure wholehearted commitment from staff and governors to continual improvement and high achievement
- Students of all abilities achieve high standards of work throughout the school and perform well in national tests and examinations taken at the ages of 14, 16 and 18
- Students' very good attitudes to learning and relationships with teachers and amongst themselves make a strong contribution to their academic success
- Very good pastoral provision engenders a strong sense of community within the everyday life of the school. This creates an equally strong sense of belonging
- Extra-curricular activities and community links are very good
- The quality of information to parents is very good

What could be improved

- Availability of specialist accommodation on both sites and the efficiency of the use of the split site
- Compliance with legal requirements in: provision for design and technology and religious education; collective worship, and health and safety in the joint use of the adjacent leisure centre for music lessons
- Further development of the use made of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology in subjects across the curriculum
- Regular checking of the quality of teaching and learning by heads of faculty

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

The school has already identified most of the issues highlighted above in its improvement plans.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good overall improvement since the previous inspection. High standards for 14 and 18-year-olds have been well maintained and there has been good improvement in the GCSE results over the last three years. Most of the key issues from the previous inspection have been tackled effectively. Boys' attainment at GCSE has improved well so that the gap between their attainment and that of girls is now narrower than that of girls and boys nationally. Although the provision for religious education and collective worship have improved, these require further attention. The school has worked hard to reduce the inefficiencies of the split site and much reduced the movement between the two sites. The issue, however, has not been fully resolved.

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				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	C	B	A	A	very high A* well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E very low E*
A-levels/AS-levels	B	B	B	N/A	

Standards of attainment are high and students achieve well in relation to their prior attainment at all stages within the school. The table above shows that students' performance in GCSE examinations in 2000 was well above the average of schools nationally and that of similar types of schools. GCSE results in English, mathematics and science in 2000 were well above average. GCSE results in art and design, design and technology, information and communication technology, performing arts and physical education are particularly strong and well above national averages. However, results in geography, German and electronics have tended to be below average, although results in German were close to average in 2000. A-level performance has been consistently above national averages. Results are particularly

strong in mathematics, psychology, art and design and computing. Standards in advanced GNVQs in art and design and business studies are well above average.

In the 2000 National Curriculum tests for fourteen-year-olds, overall results were above national averages as well as above the average of similar types of schools. Results in English were well above average, whilst those in mathematics and science were above.

Inspection evidence largely reflects the results of national tests and examinations in 2000. In English, mathematics and science standards of work are high throughout the school, particularly in English at Key Stage 4 and in mathematics in the sixth form. Standards of literacy and numeracy in subjects across the curriculum are above average, although weaknesses in spelling and punctuation detract from what is otherwise good quality writing. Students of all abilities undoubtedly do well, but there is room in some subjects, including English and science, for the ablest to be stretched even more. Those with special educational needs make good progress and achieve well. The vast majority achieve a good range of GCSEs given their prior attainment.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Students are enthusiastic about school and are well motivated in lessons. They want to do their best and to succeed.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good in and out of lessons, often very good.
Personal development and relationships	Students' personal development is good and relationships are very good. Overall, students develop well as mature and responsible young people by the time they are ready to leave.
Attendance	Good. The attendance rate is above the national average, with unauthorised absence being much lower than national norms.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The quality of teaching is good overall. In 82 per cent of lessons teaching is at least good and in about one per cent it is less than satisfactory. A third of lessons are very good or better. The quality of teaching is good in all subjects, including in English and mathematics. As a result, students know what they are expected to do and work with purpose. Very good relationships lead to good teamwork and co-operation from students. Varied and interesting methods are a feature of good teaching and result in students working at a brisk pace, covering a good range of work and engaging actively and purposefully with their learning. Universally good subject knowledge is well used to provide cogent expositions and explanations of key points so that students grasp quickly concepts that are central to the development of good understanding. A keen focus on application of acquired knowledge in many lessons helps students to work effectively as independent learners. Although the school has yet to develop a whole-school approach to the teaching of basic skills in literacy and numeracy through subjects, numeracy skills are well taught, but opportunities to develop students' literacy further are often missed. In lessons that are otherwise satisfactory, work is

not always well matched to differing needs of the highest and lowest attainers and marking sometimes misses opportunities for pointing out to students how they could improve.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. Well thought out curricular provision which provides breadth at all key stages. However, legal requirements are not fully met in religious education, design and technology and in the use of computers across the curriculum.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Overall, the provision is good. It is well led and managed and has improved well since the last inspection. Provision for students with specific learning difficulties, although broadly satisfactory, is not as good as for those with moderate learning difficulties. Students are well supported in lessons with particularly good teaching in the sessions taken by specialist staff.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall. Very good for social development and good for moral and cultural development. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. Assemblies are well used to promote moral and spiritual awareness, but tutor periods are rarely used well for this purpose.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The pastoral system provides very good care for students. Very good attention is paid to encouraging good behaviour and attendance.

Insufficient provision is made in design and technology at Key Stage 3 to teach control and electronics. As a result, students' skills in these areas are underdeveloped. At Key Stage 4, not all students study design and technology. All students do study religious education in Key Stage 4, but those who are not taking a GCSE in it have too little time to cover the syllabus properly and are underachieving. Monitoring and support of students' academic and personal development are good. The school works well in partnership with parents and other external agencies.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good overall, with outstanding leadership from the headteacher. The level of delegation is very good and the school development team is very effective. Members of this team provide very good leadership and management in their own right. There is very good involvement of staff in whole school decision-making. Heads of faculty provide good, and in some cases very good, leadership and management of their areas.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. Governors are astute and well aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses, including legal breaches which they are currently addressing. They question the school closely and provide very good support for its development.

The school's evaluation of its performance	Good with some very good practice. Departmental reviews work extremely well in providing monitoring information on each subject. Very thorough analyses of examination results are carried out. However, not all heads of faculty regularly monitor and evaluate the quality of teaching in their areas.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Money is carefully spent to the benefit of students. Financial planning is very good and very well linked to educational priorities.

Whilst resources for learning and staffing are satisfactory, the lack of availability of specialist accommodation on both sites and some inefficiencies in timetabling result in too much movement between the two sites. The joint use of accommodation in the adjacent leisure centre for music poses some health and safety risks.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That the school expects children to work hard and achieve well • That the school and staff are approachable • The school helps children to become mature and responsible • The provision for extra-curricular activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework – some parents feel there was too much and others that there was too little • Information about their children's progress

Inspection evidence whole-heartedly supports the positive views expressed by parents but there is little evidence to support the concerns of some regarding information about their children's progress. In most subjects, the amount of homework is about right but in some, such as science, there is too much. Also, it is not always evenly distributed over the two-week timetable.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. The attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. Results of tests called 'cognitive abilities tests' (CATs) in verbal and non-verbal reasoning and quantitative methods administered to students shortly after they begin at the school indicate that the majority of students achieve broadly average scores. Although the full spread of ability is represented in the results, the proportions of students scoring particularly high or low scores are noticeably lower than usual in a fully comprehensive intake. Given this start, students' achievements in public examinations and tests at the end of each key stage are good and point to significant improvement in their attainment as they move through the school. This good progress is confirmed by inspection evidence. Overall, standards of attainment have improved well since the previous inspection particularly in mathematics and science at both key stages. The high standards reached in National Curriculum tests and at A-level have been maintained and performance in GCSE examinations has improved with the downward trend at the time of the last inspection being reversed to a distinctly upward trend over the last three years.
2. In the National Curriculum tests for fourteen-year-olds in 2000, students performed better than students nationally and their results, based on average points scores, were above national averages as well as above the average of similar types of schools. The average points score in English was best being well above the national average and the average of similar types of schools. In mathematics and science, the average points scores were above national averages. In science, the overall performance was well above that found in similar types of schools whilst in mathematics it was in line with such schools. In English and science, the proportions of students gaining at least the expected level and the higher levels were well above average. There was a significant improvement in science from previous years in the proportion of students gaining the higher levels. In mathematics the proportions of students gaining the expected level and the higher levels were above average.
3. The trend in the tests for fourteen-year-olds has been a steadily improving one, with the most marked improvement being in English where results have moved from being broadly in line with national results in 1997 to being well above average. The overall science results, based on the average points score, have fluctuated a little being above average in 1997 and 2000 but well above in 1998 and 1999.
4. Students' results in GCSE examinations have been improving at a good rate over the last three years, with particularly marked improvement in the most recent examinations in 2000 where overall performance, based on average points score, was well above the average of schools nationally and the average of similar types of schools. In addition, the results for 2000 show good improvement on the results when the school was last inspected. The proportions of students gaining five or more GCSEs at grades A*-C was well above average in 2000 as was the proportion of students gaining one or more GCSEs at grades A*-G. Performance in five or more GCSEs at grades A*-G was not as good, nonetheless it was still above the national average and in line with the average of similar types of schools. The performance in the proportions gaining A*-G grades is actually better than the similar school's comparison indicates because the latter does not take sufficient account of the impact on these results of the special needs unit.
5. GCSE results in English, mathematics and science in 2000 were also well above average. Results in English have been consistently high over the last three years. In almost all subjects at GCSE students attain standards that are at least in line with and

often above the standards found nationally. Results in subjects such as art and design, design and technology, information and communication technology, performing arts and physical education are particularly good being significantly above average and showing good progress in terms of the better than expected performance of the students taking examinations in these subjects. GCSE results in business studies, French and history are usually above average. In electronics, geography and German results tend to be below average with students performing less well than in their other subjects although the most recent results of 2000 in German were close to national averages. This signals the start of a trend of improvement in students' attainment in German which was confirmed by inspection findings. Inspection findings also confirm that the school has begun to tackle successfully the issue of low attainment in geography at Key Stage 4, which is now being turned around.

6. A-level performance has been consistently above the national average over the last four years and shows a steady improvement in line with the trend nationally. The school's own analysis of results indicates that students make significant progress between GCSE and A-level. That is to say that they achieve much better A-level results than their GCSE results indicated they were likely to obtain. A-level performance is particularly strong in mathematics, psychology, art and design and computing where it is significantly better than national averages. A-level results in biology have been improving well since the last inspection. Students taking vocational courses such as advanced GNVQs also do very well with results being very good in business education and art and design. A very high proportion of students achieve a merit or a distinction in these subjects.
7. The school exceeded the targets it set for performance in GCSE examinations in 2000 by quite a wide margin. The official targets, agreed with the local education authority, for the year 2001, were similar to the targets for 2000, but the school's internal targets have been revised upwards. They are suitably challenging with students' performance at GCSE being expected to match the performance of 2000.
8. The overall differences in examination and test results between girls and boys have decreased since the last inspection, where it was a key issue. Boys' attainment at GCSE has improved well so that the gap between their and girls' attainment is now narrower than that of girls and boys nationally. There are some differences evident in individual subjects, however, and in some subjects there are fluctuations in the differences between the performance of boys and girls. For example, in German at GCSE, girls outperform boys by a slightly greater margin than the difference nationally. In science in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 and 2000, girls performed better than boys at Level 5 and above. At the higher levels there was a different pattern, with boys attaining better than girls until this year.
9. Inspection evidence largely reflects the results of national tests and examinations. In English, students demonstrate very good speaking and listening skills and consistently good reading skills. Although their writing demonstrates good use of language and they write at length sustaining pace and interest, it is marred at times by errors in spelling and punctuation. This is evident even in the work of sixth-form students. Mathematical skills are good at both key stages, with some excellent examples of investigative work at GCSE level. In science, students demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of scientific facts and ideas and are developing good skills in investigative work. Given their prior attainment, students achieve well in science and mathematics at all key stages, and in English, their achievement is good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. However, both in science and English at Key Stage 3, there is scope for the ablest students to be stretched more and to achieve even higher standards. Standards of numeracy and literacy in subjects are good overall, but standards of literacy are more varied, being good in relation to students' skills in reading and extracting information from texts, but

weaker in relation to written work. Incorrect spelling and use of punctuation are evident in what is otherwise well composed written work.

10. In other subjects, attainment as indicated by inspection evidence is above average in all but design and technology, modern foreign languages and music at Key Stage 3 and in German at Key Stage 4, where students are attaining average standards. In religious education, students in Key Stage 4 who are not following the GCSE course are underachieving and are attaining standards that are below expectations as there is insufficient time for them to develop sufficient depth of knowledge and understanding. Whilst these students have a secure enough grasp of contemporary moral and social issues, their knowledge of religious traditions and beliefs is weak. The attainment of students following the GCSE course in religious education is above average. In design and technology at Key Stage 3, aspects of work are good or very good. Students' designing skills are particularly well developed. However, lack of provision for teaching electronics and control means that skills in these aspects of technology are underdeveloped. Attainment in music at Key Stage 3 is partly held back by loss of teaching time due to movement between the two sites but also because there are insufficient opportunities to record their work. Attainment is well above average in art and design, history and information and communication technology at Key Stage 4. In art and design, students are very skilled in using a wide range of tools, materials and techniques to produce work that is vibrant, colourful and imaginative. In history, the very good understanding students have of historical enquiry means that they are skilled in drawing conclusions about the past from a variety of sources, such as historical documents.
11. Given their starting points, students achieve well in most subjects. Their achievement is very good in art and design at Key Stage 4 and in history and information and communication technology at Key Stages 3 and 4. When using computers, students make rapid gains in their skills and learn very effectively how to use a wide range of programs. However, not enough use is made of information and communication technology in subjects. There is some underachievement in German for students in middle ability sets, where not enough progress is made in developing speaking and listening skills. Overall, though, there is no significant underachievement other than in religious education in the non-GCSE course at Key Stage 4. Achievement in geography is satisfactory in both key stages and satisfactory in music at Key Stage 3.
12. Good standards of attainment were seen in most lessons in the sixth form, and these good standards are reflected in the samples of written work of students examined by inspectors. Very high attainment was seen in art and design at A-level and advanced GNVQ courses, where students produce work that is very well composed and has a powerful visual impact. Excellent use of imagination and creativity are key features that identify the work of sixth-form students. Standards of work are well above average in English, psychology and religious education at A-level and in the Advanced GNVQ business studies course. In English, for example, students demonstrate very good skills in literary criticism whilst in psychology and business education, they have well developed analytical skills. Overall, standards of achievement in the sixth form are good, with very good achievement in English and art and design and excellent achievement in history and computing. In physical education, students' achievement is better in their practical work than in the theory where it tends to be satisfactory.
13. Students with special educational needs make good progress in all subjects, especially when they receive extra help from classroom assistants. By the end of Key Stage 4 all of these students achieve appropriate qualifications. For example, many students with moderate learning difficulties are awarded certificates of achievement with distinctions in English, mathematics, science and French. Nearly all achieve at least one pass at GCSE and several gain high grades. Students with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) make good progress with reading and writing when they are

taught in small groups. They cope well in most lessons but not all of these students receive sufficient tuition in basic literacy to improve their skills significantly. Lack of specialist resources, such as computers with relevant programs, also impact on the development of literacy skills for students with dyslexia.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

14. Students' attitudes to the school, their personal development and their relationships are of a very high standard, showing a further improvement on the good standards identified at the previous inspection. Standards of behaviour and attendance remain good overall.
15. Students' very high level of enthusiasm throughout the school makes them eager to learn and aids their concentration in lessons. At a working lunch with inspectors they happily described their love for the school and their affection for their teachers. Such very positive attitudes were confirmed by parents responding to the questionnaire, 93 per cent of them agreeing that their children like going to school. Students listen attentively and apply themselves diligently to their work, showing high levels of collaboration when working in groups. This very enthusiastic approach to learning makes a very good contribution to raising standards throughout the school, and is one of its major strengths.
16. The school's shared values, embodied in its main aims, create high expectations that are reflected in the generally good behaviour in all key stages, threatened only by the disruptive activities of a very small minority of disaffected students. Such good behaviour, confirmed by the great majority of parents responding to the questionnaire, greatly aids access to the curriculum by making all members of the school family feel safe. Students can remember very few incidents of bullying or aggressive behaviour, so much so that a confrontation between two students during the inspection very quickly became the talk of the school and a matter of acute embarrassment to other students and staff. The three permanent exclusions of the most recent reporting year (1999/2000) were in full compliance with regulations, and were imposed when all other avenues had been explored. The increase in fixed term exclusions in the same period reflects the school's increasingly high expectations of its students in terms of their behaviour and their commitment to raising standards. Students make their way around the school in a disciplined and orderly manner, even in communal areas where congestion might be expected to occur. Students also behave responsibly along the footpath known as the 'link-path' between sites, assuring inspectors that they feel quite safe as they make their way between lower and upper school.
17. The very good relationships throughout the school create a climate of harmony and friendliness based on mutual respect. Students declare that they get on well with adults in the school, while these latter act as good role models through their exemplary conduct and their respect for the school's high values. Inspectors saw evidence of shared commitment and good teamwork by both staff and students at a Year 8 Achievement Evening, where teachers from across the school supported students by helping them to set out their work and by entertaining their parents. Such high quality relationships and mutual support lay a firm foundation for learning, and reflect the very good progress made by students in their personal development. They enjoy working independently and in groups with minimum supervision, and are eager to display the fruit of their efforts. They act democratically in work groups, sharing responsibilities and electing scribes and spokespersons for their respective teams. Students elected to the school council show great maturity in debating issues and representing the interests of their peers. In conversation with Inspectors they articulate well and display extensive knowledge of current affairs. Students also demonstrate their care and concern for the disadvantaged in society by raising

considerable sums of money for their chosen charities. Between March and July this year for example, they organised several fundraising projects, and were able to donate £3,580 to charities such as Christie's Against Cancer, Alder Hey Rocking Horse Appeal, Christian Aid, Rainbow Trust, the Mozambique Floods Appeal, and the East Cheshire Hospice. Their enthusiastic support for such charities demonstrates their growing sense of responsibility and acknowledgement of their world citizenship.

18. The school's attendance record of 93 per cent for the most recent reporting year (1999/2000), is good, being above the national average for similar schools and remaining in line with the good attendance records noted at the previous inspection. The rate of unauthorised absence is below the national average. Procedures for recording attendance comply with legal requirements. Punctuality at both morning and afternoon lessons is generally good, being adversely affected only by the unreliability of transport services from outlying areas, and by the loss of time associated with routine movement between the two school sites. Such good levels of attendance ensure full access to the curriculum for most students.
19. The parents believed girls and boys do different amounts of homework. From discussions with students and the work survey girls put more time and effort into completing the homework set than boys.
20. Since September the school has started to include students with moderate learning difficulties, who were previously taught separately in the special educational needs unit, in more mainstream lessons. Relationships between students are generally very good and they show concern for each other's well being. For example, Year 7 students showed great concern for a child with a physical disability in their class who had fallen down in the playground. In a physical education lesson, students were keen to ensure that a fellow student with emotional and behaviour difficulties could participate fully in group and team activities. A few low attaining students resent being taught with students with moderate learning difficulties. They are inattentive and lack concentration in some lessons and teachers have to work hard to motivate them and improve relationships.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

21. The quality of teaching is good overall with 82 per cent of lessons being at least good and very few, about one per cent, being less than satisfactory. A third of lessons are very good or better. The quality of teaching is best in the sixth form, where it is very good overall. About a third of lessons in the sixth form were of very good quality and a further tenth were excellent. None were less than satisfactory. Most of the satisfactory teaching was in Key Stage 3, where the incidence of very good or excellent teaching was also less frequent than in the other key stages.
22. The quality of teaching in English, mathematics and science was good overall, with very good teaching at A-level in mathematics. In other subjects, the quality of teaching was good overall and frequently very good in art and design, history, information and communication technology, physical education and religious education. Teaching in personal development subjects, such as personal and social education and effective learning, was invariably good.
23. Teachers plan thoroughly and share clear learning objectives with students. As a result, students know what they are expected to do and can work with purpose. Planning shows that teachers have a good knowledge of the students they are teaching. In most lessons this leads to an effective match of work to the needs of individual students. However, in a minority of lessons, particularly in English and science at Key Stage 3, the ablest students are not challenged as much as they could and should be. On occasion, the wide range of abilities in a group makes it

difficult for teachers to focus effectively on the needs of students of all abilities. In a few mathematics lessons, an overemphasis on working individually with students results in some loss of pace and challenge so that students are not stretched as much as they might be.

24. Very good relationships established by teacher's lead to good teamwork and co-operation from students. In mathematics, for example, students in most classes are keen to participate in answering questions or explaining their ideas and asking questions. Brisk pace and varied and interesting methods are a feature of good teaching and result in students working at a good pace covering a good range of work and engaging actively and purposefully with the learning process. Tasks in English are interesting and provide students with good opportunities to apply their creative skills through expressive performance and by writing original poetry. In business studies, the use of case studies makes the subject more real for students and provides interesting and lively topics for discussion.
25. Teachers' universally good subject knowledge is well used to provide cogent expositions and explanations of key points so that students grasp quickly concepts that are central to the development of good understanding. In English, for example, teachers place strong emphasis on how language is being used to convey different meanings and create varying styles. This approach results in students thinking carefully and imaginatively about their own use of language and applying it more deliberately to their own work. A keen focus on application of acquired knowledge in many lessons helps students to work effectively as independent learners. For example, the confidence of second year sixth-form students is the result of rigorous and challenging teaching of subject specific skills and knowledge. Occasionally though, teachers miss opportunities to further students' subject skills or knowledge. For example, sometimes in science at Key Stage 3, teachers miss opportunities to include features of investigative work into practical sessions. In a minority of modern foreign language lessons, teachers all too readily revert to giving explanations in English thus making insufficient use of the modern foreign language. In contrast, in art and design, teachers use their expertise very effectively to help develop students' techniques with a wide range of tools and materials. In design and technology, teachers use their very good design and graphics skills to enable students to achieve a high standard of work in their own designs.
26. Teachers' good subject knowledge is also used well to pose questions and to probe and extend students' knowledge and understanding further. Resources are also well used to aid students' learning and in the best lessons these are imaginative and stimulating. However, in a minority of lessons, the range of resources available is not effectively enough matched to the needs of students, especially lower attainers.
27. Basic skills of literacy and numeracy are mostly effectively taught. However, opportunities are missed at times, particularly in the teaching of basic literacy, as there is as yet no agreed whole-school approach to teaching literacy and numeracy. Marking sometimes misses opportunities for pointing students in the right direction in terms of how they could improve. On the whole, though, students receive good feedback on the quality of their work, particularly at GCSE level and in the sixth form.
28. The teaching of students with special educational needs is good. It is very good on certificate of achievement courses, where teachers show high expectations of what students can achieve and manage classes well. Teachers in the learning development faculty have a good understanding of methods that help students with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) to improve their reading and writing. When teaching small groups they provide a variety of suitable activities that interest students and keep them working at a good pace. Classroom assistants provide very effective support for students with special needs in mainstream lessons and monitor students'

progress closely. Teachers from the learning development faculty have just begun to support students in mainstream lessons this term, instead of teaching students with moderate learning difficulties separately. They share the teaching with subject teachers, but as yet they are not as effective as they might be. There is a lack of sufficient shared planning by subject and support teachers. More joint planning is needed so that subject and support teachers can use a wider range of teaching methods in these jointly taught lessons.

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

29. The curriculum is mainly broad and balanced across Key Stages 3 and 4, providing a good range of learning opportunities. The wide range of A/AS-levels and vocational A-levels and GNVQ courses in the sixth form is a very good provision. Students benefit from the increased curriculum opportunities provided in a big school, including a very good extra-curricular programme.
30. The curriculum provided for students in Key Stage 3 is good. There are opportunities for students to gain a good range of knowledge, skills and values. The development of additional subject options in Year 9, including a second modern language, is a positive movement to improve provision, as well as preparing students very well for the next phase of their education. There are, however, a small number of statutory breaches. In design and technology two required elements, electronics and control, are not currently provided. There are some non-statutory weaknesses in the timetabling of the second modern foreign language in Year 9, where the distribution of periods over the two-week timetable is not advantageous to learning as it impedes the regular language practice and reinforcement which are vital to the effective continuity in learning. There is a good provision of discrete computing lessons but the use of information and communication technology in individual subjects is at an early stage of development and needs to be increased and embedded more firmly in teaching strategies.
31. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is good. There are, however, as in Key Stage 3, some breaches of statutory requirements. There is insufficient time given to religious education to cover the locally agreed syllabus fully for those students who are not following a GCSE course. Not all students study design and technology. Overall, however, the range of subjects that students can opt for is good and supplements very well the compulsory subjects they are required to take. Planning for the introduction of vocational elements and work-related learning is well in hand, ready for implementation in 2001. As in Key Stage 3, there is insufficient development of the use of computers across the curriculum to assist learning in individual subjects.
32. The sixth-form provision is very good in terms of both the wide range of academic and vocational courses on offer and the opportunities offered to students to progress into employment or to higher education via an academic or vocational route. The development of an effective key skills course in Year 12 is assisting the development of students' communications, application of number and computing skills. Religious education is largely absent in the sixth form, which is a statutory breach.
33. All students in Key Stage 3 follow a well-planned course in effective learning, which includes personal and social education as well as the development of a range of learning and interpersonal skills. Discrete lessons in the use of computers are provided in this programme and appropriate arrangements included for providing sex and drugs education. Overall, the approach taken in the effective learning programme is imaginative and innovative and plans are well underway to introduce it into Key Stage 4 next academic year. The personal education programme in Key Stage 4 provides very good opportunities for students to acquire a range of skills to prepare

them for adult life. Topics include health education and substance abuse, rights and responsibilities and the development of understanding of issues associated with marriage and the family. The governors' curriculum committee has agreed the sex education programme, which is delivered in personal and social education along with religious education.

34. At the moment the school has made too little progress on the development of whole-school literacy and numeracy strategies. However, this is part of current school development planning and some departments have started to teach these essential skills. Overall, there is a very well co-ordinated and coherent approach to curriculum development. The school is very aware of the areas requiring development and has documented plans to tackle these. For instance, the governors have already agreed changes to the curricular provision from September 2001 so that statutory requirements are met with respect to current breaches in design and technology and religious education in Key Stage 4. Curricular planning overall has improved considerably since the last inspection.
35. The split site nature of the school still results in some loss of curriculum time. This situation was commented upon in the last report and while the loss of time has been reduced, further work on timetabling and curricular organisation is needed to reduce the loss of teaching time. The time lost in teaching music as a consequence of movement between the sites, identified in the last report, is still adversely affecting standards. Very effective work has been carried out on planning learning outcomes and in the development of learning and teaching strategies since the last inspection and this has had a very positive effect on standards achieved. In some departments appropriately challenging work has been provided for the very high attaining students. This was seen in mathematics, history, modern foreign languages and in art. Other subjects have yet to follow suit.
36. There is good provision for students with special educational needs. The school meets the requirements for students with statements of special educational needs as outlined in their statements. For others on the special educational needs register, the school has appropriate individual education plans in place. In Key Stage 4 appropriate courses are offered in English, mathematics, science and French for those students who find GCSE too difficult. A similar course in humanities leads to an externally awarded certificate. Planning for this is not sufficiently developed as teachers are unsure about the standards they expect students to achieve to gain the award. Good links with the local college of further education allow students with special needs to broaden their experience further at Key Stage 4. They attend the college for one morning each week to study short vocational courses. A study support course in Year 9 helps students with specific learning difficulties (dyslexia) to overcome some of their difficulties in a range of subjects. However, some students with dyslexia do not get enough help to improve their basic literacy skills.
37. All students have equal access to the curriculum. The school provides a well-designed curriculum to meet the needs, interests and aptitudes of its diverse student population. Well developed and informative Pupil Grouping and Achievement Policies provide good guidance on organising students into teaching groups. Where students are placed in sets on the basis of their prior attainment, it is carefully done so as to maximise learning opportunities. Setting by ability occurs in mathematics and modern foreign languages. Most other subjects teach students in mixed ability groups, although in some, such as science, there is a combination of grouping by ability and mixed ability teaching. At Key Stage 4 the curriculum is well organised so as to provide for one group with learning difficulties in English, mathematics, humanities and science. These students receive additional learning support. Overall, the arrangements for grouping students work well.

38. The school has been very successful in forging links with the local and wider world community. These provide good opportunities for students to extend their skills and expertise in a wide range of activities. Links include those with the local churches as well as exchange links in psychology and sport with the United States and with Finland and Italy via the Comenius programme. Equally good links have been built with parents. There are good and improving links with the main feeder schools, which enable a very smooth transition to take place on entry in Year 7, both socially and academically. There are very good links with the world of work and higher education. The 'Investigations Week' held annually in June, for all years, provides a wide range of enhancement courses, such as exploring different cultural traditions in Key Stage 3, and in the case of the sixth form, an opportunity to understand and prepare for the labour market and the world of higher education. This is supported in the sixth form by an effective and appreciated higher education evening.
39. There is very good provision for careers education and guidance helped considerably by a very well organised, easily accessible careers library, providing up-to-date information on careers and further and higher education. The department has a good relationship with the local authority careers partnership and has been awarded the Investors in Careers Award for its work and effectiveness. Students are provided with good advice at times of transition between Years 9 and 10 and on entry to the sixth form. There is work experience in Year 10 and students taking German have the opportunity of a work placement in Germany.
40. The school's provision of extra-curricular activities is very good. There are a number of visits to and school exchanges with Europe and the USA and links are now being developed with China. There are many opportunities in sport, including outdoor pursuits, and in the performing arts. There is a very good range of other school clubs that play a very important part in extending learning opportunities and giving students new cultural, leisure and sporting activities. Parents quite correctly express strong support and approval for the school's extra-curricular provision.
41. The school's aims, arrived at after lengthy consultation, enshrine a view of education which stresses its totality. Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is central to these aims. However, most departments have not systematically planned for this provision but nevertheless there was a considerable amount of classroom work which supported personal development. In addition, the school is effective in creating a strong sense of community, which enables staff and students to feel that they belong. The overall provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.
42. The school does not meet the legal requirements for an act of worship but it does seek to follow the spirit of the law by conducting a weekly assembly and also by encouraging tutors to use the form time for reflection and worship. The assembly themes are carefully chosen. During the visit the assemblies seen did offer a good opportunity for spiritual development but tutor time was rarely used for an act of worship or to provide opportunities for students to reflect on relevant themes. There was no evidence of a planned approach to tutor time. Whilst a few teachers did make positive use of this time, most did not.
43. The provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. Subjects such as religious education, English, art and history provided good opportunities for students to explore questions of value and belief, enabling them to reflect upon spiritual issues. Students' opinions are valued and opportunities for a sensitive discussion of other people's beliefs and values are frequently found in subjects such as English, history and religious education. In a religious education lesson students were considering the value of prayer in a thoughtful and purposeful way, whilst in English the medium of poetry is used to convey a sense of awe and wonder. In other subjects such as

science and mathematics opportunities are missed.

44. The provision for moral development is good. A well-understood code of conduct provides a framework of values which encourages mutual respect. The staff provide good role models. There is a positive non-confrontational ethos in the school characterised by very good relationships between students and staff. A culture of reward rather than punishment seeks to encourage students' involvement and participation in school life. There are a significant number of opportunities within the curriculum provision for students to examine relevant moral topics. In religious education students were carefully considering racism whilst in history the lessons to be learnt from the holocaust were dealt with. In English, the moral dilemmas presented by refugees seeking asylum were discussed whilst in business education the ethical practices in the world of business were examined. In information and communication technology problems associated with censorship and the use of the Internet were covered well.
45. The provision for social development is very good. The school aims of social inclusion are reflected in the sense of belonging that permeates the school. In a well organised and much appreciated pre-school induction visit to Menai for Year 6 pupils before they join the school as Year 7 students, a strong team spirit is developed. Social relationships are supportive and encouraging. Students are fiercely loyal to the school and fully involved in a variety of activities. Whilst there is no prefect system students are provided with good opportunities to play a very active role in organising clubs, collecting for charity and helping in assemblies. Students are involved in activities such as paired reading between sixth-form students and lower school students. There is an active school council providing students with good opportunities to exercise responsibility.
46. This sense of teamwork is further developed through opportunities to work in pairs and groups in subjects such as physical education and modern foreign languages. These activities are extended into the community through opportunities for participation in local musical events, fund raising and community visits. During the inspection students and staff were practising for a musical event to be held in a local church.
47. Many subjects include opportunities for students to examine contemporary social issues. A well organised and delivered personal and social education programme includes topics such as euthanasia. This is supported by work done in religious education, English and history.
48. The cultural provision is good. Students' knowledge and experience of their own and other cultures are very well provided for in several curriculum areas. Students' own cultural heritage is strongly reinforced in art, history, music, and religious education. In a general studies art lesson sixth-form students were considering the merits of the recent entries for the Turner prize. In a wide-ranging programme of musical events students explore a number of musical traditions including an active steel band. This provision is further enriched by a variety of extra-curricular activities such as in music and physical education. There are frequent visits to galleries, theatres and exhibitions. A number of visiting artists and musicians come into the school.
49. Students' awareness of the multicultural nature of our society is provided for in several curriculum areas. Religious education covers all the major religions found in British society, whilst art and music draw material from several cultures. African art features in art lessons; other cultures are looked at during investigations week. There are numerous opportunities for students to visit other countries ranging from day trips to France to visits to China, America and Bolivia. Long-established exchange programmes with both France and Germany extend this provision.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

50. The school makes very good provision for the health, safety and personal security of its students, resulting in a sense of belonging and well being that greatly aids learning. The good quality of educational and personal support and guidance is further supported by good procedures for monitoring students' academic performance and personal development. At their meeting with the Inspectors parents reported that they were really impressed by how well the school knows its students and their families.
51. The school's procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are very good. A computerised registration system allows early identification of patterns of absence, and triggers an automatic reminder letter to the defaulting family. Students achieving below 80 per cent attendance levels are targeted for special attention. In addition to the attendance scores included in their annual report students receive a termly breakdown of their attendance record. The excellent partnership established with the education welfare officer ensures her support in any follow up action. Students with very good attendance are publicly rewarded for their achievement.
52. The very good procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are supported by clear and detailed behaviour and anti-bullying policies applied with vigour by adults in the school. The assertive discipline log maintained by the school helps teachers to monitor incidents of non-compliance. The result is an orderly school community that provides a solid platform for teaching and learning. The high standards required of students are well emphasised so that all students are aware of what is expected of them.
53. Since the previous inspection the school has improved its procedures for assessment. These are now of good quality, starting with a systematic baseline assessment when students start at the school, and continuing with a system for tracking the progress of students through the school. An effective monitoring system supports those who are underachieving. Class-work and homework are regularly marked for all students, and the annual report to parents gives clear information about estimated levels of attainment as well as the actual levels achieved. Good use is made of assessment information to guide curricular planning. Target setting for individual students, involving average and best ever targets, is used effectively and the outcomes are used to plan for the next phase, to extend a greater challenge, or to drive changes in teaching styles.
54. Good use is made of homework, classwork and tests in order to monitor progress, while teacher support and involvement in the mentoring programme for those students in Key Stage 4 who would benefit from a mentor, the student grouping arrangements, and the effective learning programme improve students' attitude and approach to learning. The initial trauma of entry to a secondary education is greatly eased by the school's very good induction programme. The memories of their residential week at Menai for example stay with most students throughout their time at school. There is strong provision for all aspects of health in personal, social and health education courses, such as a lesson on stress for Year 11. Students also receive good advice in preparation for their choices at Year 9.
55. The school's very good procedures for monitoring and supporting personal development include themed learning in personal, social and health education, and assemblies linked to the school's effective learning programme. Students are routinely involved in their own assessments, and the awards and merits system celebrates individual achievement as an incentive to further effort. Independent and group learning promote a sense of personal and social responsibility, while involvement in the school council imbues students with the principles of negotiated solutions and responsible citizenship. Female students for example, attribute the decision to allow them to wear trousers to the effectiveness of the school council.

56. The school makes very good provision for the health, safety and welfare of those in its care. All adults in the school know the designated person for child protection, and her deputy, while many other members of staff including support staff have attended relevant training. The detailed health and safety policy includes effective procedures for recording and reporting hazards, termly risk assessments, termly fire drills, and weekly alarm tests. During the inspection several health and safety hazards, mainly related to the joint use facilities in the adjacent leisure centre were reported to the school's managers. Most support staff hold a current first aid certificate, and all Year 8 students, as from 1999, follow a course in basic first aid. Proper procedures are in place for recording and reporting accidents. Students questioned by Inspectors knew what to do in the event of an accident or incident.
57. Since the previous inspection the school has improved procedures for recording the progress of students with special educational needs. Annual reviews of statements are carried out efficiently. The learning development faculty ensures that individual education plans are written and reviewed for all students on the special needs register and the school makes good use of extra help from a variety of outside agencies. The careers service is especially efficient in making students aware of opportunities that are available to them when they leave school. The head of the learning development faculty makes good use of information provided by primary schools and provides all teachers with useful pen portraits of students' needs and abilities. Classroom assistants monitor students' progress towards targets on their individual education plans very efficiently. However, these targets are not always sufficiently specific.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

58. The parents' very positive views of the school are reflected in the comments of the 34 parents attending the meeting with Inspectors. They describe the very good relationships and the high standards set by adults in the school, as well as the school's intimate knowledge of their children. Parents commented on the excellent transition arrangements from primary education. They praised teachers for their exemplary teaching, and for their commitment to the various extra-curricular activities. There were mixed views about the amount of homework, about its spread over its two-week cycle and about variations in the use of the home/school diary. Inspection evidence confirms that the school needs to work on these issues as well as students' concerns that teachers do not always keep to the published homework timetables. Some parents too said that a small minority of disruptive students was affecting the concentration of others. Inspection evidence indicates that on the whole, students' behaviour in lessons is good, often very good. However, there are some students with challenging behaviour who if not managed well can cause disruption. However, this happens very rarely.
59. Of the 232 responses to the questionnaire more than 90 per cent agreed that their children like coming to school, that they make good progress, that they behave well, and that the school helps them to become mature and responsible. Parents say that it is a well-managed school that demands high standards of their children, and enjoys a good working relationship with parents. Between 15 and 20 per cent of respondents expressed concerns about homework, and about the quality of information on their children's progress. Inspectors found this latter claim to be unsubstantiated, but since this concern was expressed at the previous inspection too they suggest that the school provide parents with a summary of the ways in which it delivers such information.
60. The quality and range of information provided by the school are very good. The sources of information include a very informative prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents, though the section on special educational needs does not

include details on its strategy of integration and inclusion. There are half-termly newsletters as well. The school produces a curriculum summary document, annual reports on students' progress – now including areas for further improvement – and a short report earlier in the year. Open evenings, achievement evenings, information evenings, parents' evenings, options evenings for Year 9, induction evenings for students in Years 6, 10 and 12, student planners, award cards, and awards assemblies all contribute to the provision of information for parents. In addition the parent teacher association (PTA) publishes a regular newsletter with information about school activities and events. There is extensive consultation with parents, for example, about curriculum development.

61. Parental involvement in their children's learning has had a good impact on standards not only by their support for the activities of the PTA but also by becoming directly involved in the daily life of the school. Some twenty parents in all assist with such activities as helping out in the school library, assisting students with their reading skills, or organising sporting activities. About 90 per cent of parents of Year 9 students take part in the 'Go to Work with your Parents' day, and the remaining ten per cent of children visit local industries. Additionally, on a practical day-to-day level they make a valuable contribution to their children learning by simply ensuring that they arrive regularly and punctually at school each day, and by supporting them with their homework.
62. Parents of students with special educational needs are provided with good information about their child's needs and progress and teachers listen carefully to parents' views, especially when statements of special educational needs are reviewed each year.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

63. The overall leadership and management of the school are very good. The leadership provided by the headteacher is excellent. Working with a very effective and capable school development team, he provides very clear educational direction for the school. All aspects of school life have been evaluated and detailed action plans are in place to raise educational standards even further. Already, many of the plans have been effectively embedded in the work of the school, for example, the development of teaching and learning styles and the emphasis now being placed by teachers on clear learning aims in lessons. The management structure, mentioned in the last report, has been improved so that there is effective communication and coherence between all levels of management. Staff understand their role and share a commitment to improve results in external tests and examinations.
64. The headteacher was appointed three years ago. Since the last inspection report he has restructured the senior management team to form a school development team. There is now a flatter structure with seven directors each leading a management group, called a key area group, that is responsible for a major aspect of whole-school development, such as curriculum, student achievement and resources. The internal management structure of the school is replicated in the structure of the governors' committees, with a committee that exactly matches, and works closely in tandem with, each management group. Governors visit the school regularly to discuss and oversee policy decisions and they are closely involved in school development planning. The school finance committee and other governing body committees agree priorities before referring policies and planning documents to the full governing body.
65. Members of the school development team provide very good leadership in their own right within their areas of responsibility. There is effective leadership in subjects and in the pastoral areas and all staff are given the opportunity to contribute to the life and

future development of the school. Overall there is very good delegation of and accountability for the delegated responsibilities at all levels of management. In addition, all staff have the opportunity to contribute to whole school decision-making and development through the key area groups led by the directors.

66. The school's aims are well met, not only through the standards the students achieve, but also by the very good relationships and interaction the school has with parents and the local and wider community. Evidence of this comes primarily from the parents' strong endorsement of the work of the school and their opinion that the students are expected to work hard and that they do so.
67. An effective governing body plays a key part in shaping the direction of the school. The governors have a committee structure, which matches the school key area groups, and this keeps them closely in touch with all developments. Governors know the school well and they have a very good grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are aware of the outstanding statutory breaches, mainly within the curriculum; governors have concrete plans on how these issues are to be tackled and the school now needs to implement these.
68. Good use is made of regular reviews of the two-year development and four-year vision plans for subjects and key areas. This is having a positive influence on the development and growth of the school and on the quality of education provided for all students. Planning at whole school and department level reflects appropriate priorities and is complemented by a good programme of in-service training. Those responsible for seeing improvements through are clearly identified and an effective system of evaluation and accountability is operated. Whilst senior managers are effectively involved in monitoring standards and the quality of teaching and learning, not all heads of faculty monitor and evaluate teaching in their areas on a regular basis. The school is well placed to respond to the demands of performance management. There is a very genuine commitment and enthusiasm from the governors, headteacher, senior management and all staff to continue to seek improvements within the school. This is backed up by an excellent vision, and planning and management at all levels is in place to provide the school with the means to raise good standards even further.
69. Since the last inspection the school has introduced a major change to the way students with special educational needs are taught. Students with moderate learning difficulties are included in mainstream lessons and are no longer taught in a separate unit. This successful development has required a clear vision and careful planning. A committed team of teachers and classroom assistants are working towards further improving the provision for special educational needs under the good leadership and management of the head of the learning development faculty. Plans for further development rightly identify the need to increase the involvement of all subject teachers in monitoring students' progress. However, planning for the future is hampered by lack of certainty about future funding arrangements for students with special educational needs. Little progress has been made since the previous inspection with the production of criteria for evaluating the success of the school's special needs policy. This requires attention. The governing body does not fulfil its statutory duty to outline changes to the policy or to report on how successfully the policy has been implemented.
70. The school collects and analyses a comprehensive range of data on student's performance from attainment on entry and throughout their time at the school. Teachers are familiar with individual student reading ages on entry from verbal and non-verbal testing results and there are very good systems in place for monitoring students' progress and behaviour. Teachers are familiar with statistical information provided for monitoring progress and predicted GCSE, A-level and GNVQ grades. This includes local and national averages together with best ever targets for

performance. It is not always clear how this information is used to better inform the day-to-day planning for lessons.

71. Faculty and departmental reviews are conducted every four years. This includes classroom observation by the school development team, heads of faculty and heads of department. An adviser or education consultant provides an external view of the standards of achievement. The departmental reviews have a good impact on guiding the further development and improvement of faculties. For example, the modern foreign languages review led to the development of the policy on the use of target language in lessons. The mathematics review resulted in the introduction of the teaching of numeracy in mathematics lessons in the format recommended by the National Numeracy Strategy.
72. The governing body has an active role in guiding and monitoring the school's financial affairs, particularly through the work of the finance and resources committee, which reports regularly to the full governing body. Governors review regularly the progress towards the targets in the school development plan. Governors have a very clear and well-informed picture of the school's finances.
73. There is detailed monitoring and control of the budget in line with the priorities of the school finance development plan. Very good administrative systems ensure that targeted funding is well focused and costs are routinely evaluated to ensure the best use is made of resources. Strong and careful planning for the implementation of the budget by the managers ensures equity of provision for faculties and staff think the system is fair. The services manager checks regularly on practices in similar schools to ensure that the best use is made of the school's financial resources and there are regular meetings with senior administrative staff in neighbouring schools to compare methods for financial management. Comparative estimates for services and purchases are considered carefully. The director of finance and resources, the services manager and the chair of the governor's finance committee work closely together and believe very firmly in the consideration of the principles of best value for money in the way the school's resources are managed and used.
74. The level of funding for the school is above the national average for comparable schools. The money is well managed and carefully spent. Staff changes since the last inspection report have reduced the level of expenditure although the best value principle is retained in the recruitment of staff. This has created a surplus of funding which has been allocated to increase learning resources including the provision for information and communication technology. The school participates in national and local initiatives and successfully attracts additional funding designed to meet the aims of the school and to raise standards.
75. The number, qualifications and experience of teachers and support staff effectively match the demands of the curriculum. The services manager, together with her support staff, make a very positive contribution to the management of the school. Very good organisation and deployment of administrative staff has allowed teachers to concentrate on their prime function of teaching.
76. The school is a good and effective provider of in-service training. It provides the opportunity for staff to reach their potential and to become confident in their roles through the processes of induction and training. The school development plan provides a clear sense of direction to achieve the aims of the school. A strong culture of professional development is encouraged. There has been a large investment in management training. Initially this involved senior staff and heads of faculty and through the school development plan it has now been extended to middle management personnel. Staff are encouraged to be proactive in their own development and to participate in local and national developments. Fifteen per cent of the staff participated in a university Masters course specifically designed for the

needs of the school. Procedures for the induction of newly appointed staff to the school are very effective. There are good induction procedures for classroom assistants and all support staff.

77. The provision of learning resources is satisfactory overall, and there has been effective action taken to address many of the shortcomings identified in the last inspection report. The library now has an adequate stock of books and other learning resources, such as computers and videotapes, and extra funding has been provided to achieve this. The library is well managed and well used. The provision of resources for learning is good in science, physical education and religious education. However, it is barely adequate in English at Key Stage 3, especially the provision of non-literary texts. In science in Years 7 and 8, there is access to textbooks only in school, because there are not enough for all students to take one home. The provision of technical resources is now good, and there is a wide range of equipment available for use, including a computer-controlled stage lighting system, video conferencing facilities as well as good provision of keyboards and electrical equipment in music. The number of computers in the school is now adequate, although they are not always easily accessible for all subject areas. Provision is good in information and communication technology when it is taught as a separate subject. However, the booking of information and communication technology rooms is difficult in some subjects due to high demand and the structure of the timetable. The school has insufficient resources to meet the needs of students with specific learning difficulties. In particular, these students do not have sufficient opportunities to record their work through the use of information and communication technology such as notebook computers and voice recognition software.
78. The split site poses difficulties for the school since specialist facilities for all are not provided on both sites. Whilst there are science laboratories on both the lower school site and the upper school site, there are no music facilities or workshops for design and technology on the lower school site. Facilities for food technology are available only on the lower school site. Lack of such facilities and the need to use all the available accommodation mean that students and staff commute regularly between the sites. Teaching time is lost at certain periods during the day and a building programme identified as a priority at the last inspection has not materialised. Many departments are not suited together and some use of non-specialist rooms occurs. Many teachers teach in several different classrooms. All these shortcomings in accommodation place additional burden and stress on teachers. The school works hard to ensure that the net impact of the weaknesses in the accommodation do not have an untoward impact on the standard of students' work, although it is a factor in the lower attainment in music, when compared to other subjects, at Key Stage 3. Detailed plans to make best use of both sites are in place including upgrading and refurbishment of areas in the lower school in particular. There is very good accommodation for physical education both indoors and outdoors. Information and communication technology accommodation is good and there are now more computers than at the time of the previous inspection.
79. Students generally take a pride in their community and there is very little evidence of graffiti or litter to be seen around the school including on the link path between the two sites. The poor standards of cleanliness found in some areas at the last inspection have been addressed and the school provides a pleasant learning environment overall. There are problems in music where there is a poor floor surface and tiles missing off parts of the ceiling in the store rooms. Accommodation for special educational needs students is pleasant with good displays of work. The school environment is generally supported with very good examples of students' work in classrooms and corridors that act as a stimulus to learning.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

80. In order to improve the quality of education and standards further the headteacher, school development team and governors should:

- a) Further improve the use of the split site accommodation in order to further reduce the loss of time through travel between the sites by:
 - i. Timetabling more efficiently so that teachers in particular do not commute as frequently as they currently do;*
 - ii. Including time for movement in the school day;
 - iii. Providing adequate specialist accommodation on both sites;*
 - iv. Implementing as planned a reduction in the numbers of teachers teaching students in Year 7;*
 - v. Keeping under review the possibilities of improving the suiting together of rooms for each subject.

(Paragraph nos: 10, 35, 101, 109, 127, 146, 159, 160, 167)

- b) Ensure that all legal requirements are met by:
 - i. Ensuring that the requirements for the delivery of religious education in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form are met;*
 - ii. Ensuring that all subjects make relevant use of computers in their teaching;
 - iii. Making sure that all health and safety requirements in the joint use of the accommodation for music are fully met;
 - iv. Making sure that all students are following an approved course in design and technology at Key Stage 4 or are disapplied formally where this is not appropriate;*
 - v. Continuing to work towards meeting the requirements for a collective act of daily worship.

(Paragraph nos: 10, 11, 30, 31, 32, 42, 56, 78, 79, 101, 120, 126, 132, 160, 164, 165, 167, 192, 194, 196, 197)

- c) Develop effective use of information and communication technology, literacy and numeracy across the curriculum in particular to raise the standards of students' spelling and punctuation by:
 - i. Putting in place and effectively implementing policies in the use of literacy and numeracy across the curriculum so that opportunities for improving students' literacy and numeracy are not missed;*
 - ii. Involving subject teachers effectively in the production and implementation of individual education plans for students with special educational needs;
 - iii. Ensuring that the use of information and communication technology is included in schemes of work;*
 - iv. Enabling adequate access to computer equipment for all subjects.

(Paragraph nos: 9, 27, 30, 34, 36, 37, 86, 87, 88, 101, 108, 109, 128, 145, 146, 150, 177)

- d) Further develop the monitoring and evaluation of the school by:
 - i. Ensuring that all heads of subject are involved in regular monitoring of teaching in formal as well as informal ways.

(Paragraph nos: 68, 94)

* These areas are already identified in the school improvement plan as points for action.

In addition to the key issues for action, the school should also include the following minor weaknesses in its action plan:

1. Provide able students in English and science with increased challenge;
(Paragraph nos: 9, 23, 85, 88, 108, 13, 28)
2. Ensure that the literacy needs of students with specific learning difficulties are fully met and that all students with special educational needs make similar progress as their peers by providing suitable work and resources that are well matched to their needs;
(Paragraph nos: 13, 28, 85, 107, 163)
3. Ensure that tutors make effective use of tutor time;
(Paragraph no: 42)
4. Tackle effectively the concerns of parents and students about homework.
(Paragraph nos: 19, 58)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	200
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	54

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4	29	49	17	1	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	1197	276
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	119	N/a

Special educational needs	Y7-Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	57	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	204	6

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	30

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	43
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	80

Attendance

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
	%		%
School data	6.5	School data	0.6
National comparative data	7.6	National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	134	115	249

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	83	86	93
	Girls	100	88	89
	Total	183	174	182
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	77 (75)	73 (72)	73 (63)
	National	63 (64)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	41 (40)	50 (37)	43 (32)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	83	74	91
	Girls	102	81	96
	Total	185	155	187
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	73 (71)	70 (73)	73 (68)
	National	67 (84)	71 (69)	71 (67)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	40 (39)	49 (48)	43 (32)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	124	120	244

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	74	112	124
	Girls	81	114	116
	Total	155	226	240
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	64 (47)	93 (90)	98 (96)
	National	49 (47.9)	88.8 (88.5)	94.4 (94)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	45.6 (40)
	National	38.1 (37.8)

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	44	49	93

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	18.3 (18.9)	18.2 (17.3)	18.2 (18.1)	3.3 (2.2)	3.7 (2.8)	3.4 (2.6)
National	17.7 (17.7)	18.6 (18.1)	18.2 (17.9)	2.6 (2.7)	2.9 (2.8)	2.7 (2.8)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	per cent success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	100
	National	(73)

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	3
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	2
Indian	2
Pakistani	17
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	4
White	1427
Any other minority ethnic group	20

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	71	3
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	88.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	15
Total aggregate hours worked per week	368

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.6
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	24.4
Key Stage 4	21.4

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	3,813,742
Total expenditure	3,759,439
Expenditure per pupil	2,635
Balance brought forward from previous year	210,537
Balance carried forward to next year	264,840

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1,493
Number of questionnaires returned	232

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	47	46	5	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	46	46	4	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	28	55	8	2	8
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	32	46	17	3	1
The teaching is good.	41	51	3	0	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	35	45	15	2	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	62	33	4	0	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	66	30	3	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	43	41	13	1	2
The school is well led and managed.	51	37	3	1	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	53	39	3	2	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	56	31	5	0	7

Other issues raised by parents

A few parents raised the issue of disruptive behaviour from some students and expressed concerns about its effect on the learning of others. Inspection evidence indicates that on the whole, students' behaviour in lessons is good and often very good. However, there are some students with challenging behaviour who if not managed well can cause disruption. However, this happens very rarely.

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

ENGLISH

81. In the school as a whole the overall attainment in English is well above average. Standards are above average by the time students reach the end of Year 9 and are well above average by the time they reach the end of Year 11. Standards are also well above average in the sixth form. Attainment is particularly high in speaking and listening and in much of the students' work the standards of reading and writing are also well above average. Attainment is higher than that reported on at the time of the last inspection.
82. In 1999, the National Curriculum test results at Key Stage 3 show that the percentage of students reaching the expected level, Level 5, or above was above the national average and that the percentage reaching Level 6 or above was well above the national average. The test results for the year 2000 show that this picture has been improved upon. Over time, the students' average points score has been above the national average and in 1999 and 2000 it was well above the national average. In tests students are also doing better in English than they are in mathematics and science. Over the past four years there has been a strong upward trend in English results with boys and girls both doing better than average. Results have also been well above average in comparison with similar schools, including results at the higher levels. The attainment of girls is considerably higher than the attainment of boys at this key stage.
83. In 1999, GCSE results at Key Stage 4 were above average for students reaching grades A*-C and the students' average points score was higher than the national average. By the end of Year 11, boys are doing much better than boys nationally, exceeding the national average by 11 per cent for grades A*-C. The results for girls show they easily exceeded the national average for grades A*-C and also the average points score. The school also achieved a 100 per cent performance from its entry for students reaching grades A-G. In English literature, results are much more in line with the national average both for grades A*-C and in terms of the students' average points score. Boys' results are close to those of boys nationally but girls' results are better than the national results for girls. In 2000, the GCSE results were well above average and better than they were in 1999.
84. Students' attainment on current A-level courses is above average. The majority show that they can read critically, can use quotation to support well-considered views, and have good presentational skills. Most of the students follow the A-level literature course and in 2000 virtually all students achieved a pass grade. The average points score was slightly above the national average, a big improvement on the results for 1999. In 2000, virtually all the students on the English language course achieved an A-level pass although the average points score was below the national average.
85. Inspection of their work shows that the majority of students make good progress in the school. They are learning more about how language works to convey meaning and are deepening their appreciation of literature. The achievement of students with special educational needs is good for the most part as they make progress in overcoming weaknesses in reading and writing. However, in some classes at Key Stage 3 they mark time because their specific needs as identified in their individual education plans are not being fully addressed. Higher attaining students do well in the school as a whole and thrive when the pace of work quickens up at Key Stage 4 but in some lessons at Key Stage 3 their attainment is not as high as it should be because the learning objectives do not tax them sufficiently. Overall, though, the achievement of students, given their prior attainment, is good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.

86. Standards of literacy in the school are above average and many students read well and write effectively but there are, nonetheless, shortcomings in written work across the school. In some lessons in a number of different subjects work is undertaken which develops literacy skills but this is uneven and uncoordinated. Its impact on students' standards is limited because there is as yet no policy for the development of literacy in the school as a whole. The school has recognised this need and is beginning to plan a way forward. In some lessons in English, particularly at Key Stage 3, the students' weaknesses in writing are not being adequately addressed. When literacy work is the main topic of a lesson, learning objectives often focus on general concepts, such as the use of exclamation marks in writing, rather than on the specific weaknesses in the students' current work. These weaknesses are especially noticeable in writing and include the misspelling of common polysyllabic words, loose punctuation and uncertain sentence structure. Even in the sixth form it is common to find written work, which in many other respects is of high quality, marred by errors in spelling. The spelling in written work in French and German is superior to the English spelling found in students' work in modern languages.
87. In some lessons learning support teachers make good use of helpful resources to enable students to organise their ideas. An especially good example occurred when students were being helped to understand issues surrounding the use of fossil fuels. A simple but effective planning framework with clear steps in sequence was provided to help the students to organise their ideas effectively. Good use is made of the spoken word in some science lessons, for instance students were required to use language with precision when describing an animal to the rest of the class in a Year 7 lesson, but in science, generally, opportunities are lost in lessons to develop speaking and listening skills. In one science lesson in Year 8, students were required to read aloud extended extracts but the language level was too difficult for students with special educational needs. Good use is being made of dictionaries in lessons in modern languages and in one lesson a sonnet was subject to grammatical analysis in French but in day-to-day work it is common to find students making spelling errors which remain uncorrected. This disparate picture results from the lack of common agreement on what the school should do as a whole to tackle literacy issues.
88. The overall quality of teaching at Key Stage 3 is good. Lessons are well organised and built around a central learning activity that is broadly appropriate for the age and ability of the class. The content of lessons is interesting and students have good opportunities to apply their creative skills through expressive performance and by writing original poetry. In much of the work teachers place strong emphasis on how language is being used to convey meaning and create style. This is helping students to become more aware of language and to use it more deliberately in their own work. At this key stage a significant minority of lessons are no more than satisfactory. These lessons are well organised and have appropriate learning objectives for the whole class but do not cater fully for the wide ability range of the students. Many students write fluently and accurately but there are shortcomings in the written work of many of them, particularly boys. The main needs relate to spelling, the use of grammar and the construction of sentences. Teaching was not always fully addressing this wide variation in need.
89. The overall quality of teaching at Key Stage 4 is also good and in some lessons is very good. A strength of this teaching is the quality of the preparation provided for students of all abilities studying for public examinations. Teachers have expert knowledge of the course demands and base their work in the classroom on this knowledge. In one particularly effective lesson, the teacher was able to explain clearly what the examination would require, to reassure the students that they had the capability to answer the answers and to provide them with the ways of learning which would help them to do justice to themselves. Though the students did not find the challenge easy they were gaining confidence through the strong support of the teacher. Lessons frequently move along at a very fast pace, learning activities have

- time limits, questioning is pinpointed and effective and expectations are high.
90. In one particularly striking lesson, students were being helped to explore in depth the character of Lady Macbeth. They were helped to do this by the teacher's confident use of short but effective video clips that raised key questions in relation to the interpretation of the character. This approach helped the students to debate confidently whether Lady Macbeth was the personification of evil or the victim of circumstances. Even as the lesson drew to a close the students were still fully engrossed in the exploration of an issue which had captured their imagination. This lesson was a good example of how the learning of all the students was being developed by a teacher effectively challenging them to consider the limitations of stereotypical views of character.
 91. Teaching in the sixth form is good overall. Teachers have expert knowledge of the texts being studied and effective strategies to help students to appreciate them. In one lesson the teacher had the confidence to put the students in the driving seat so that they could undertake research and then lead seminars on different aspects of 'King Lear'. In another lesson the teacher was helping students revise 'Othello' by a close focus on key aspects of the text and the good use of questioning which helped the students to identify telling detail.
 92. At the heart of this successful department is a curriculum of breadth, variety and scope. The study of a wide range of literature, media, drama, and, increasingly, the application of information and communication technology, characterise the work of the department. Throughout the work there is a strong emphasis on the role of language and how it can be used to inform, persuade, instruct and entertain. The curriculum itself is presented in many effective forms. Students have excellent opportunities to discuss ideas, to share thoughts with one another and to present their findings to an audience. This is helping them to develop the skills of speaking and listening and to grow in confidence as communicators. Students are also encouraged to be creative and imaginative and to write their own poems and stories. In this they have had considerable success by winning awards in competitions. There is an extension course for the ablest students in Year 9 who are aiming to reach Level 8 in National curriculum tests.
 93. Although only recently appointed, the head of department is already providing good leadership. There is a strong will to move forward and to improve and have a shared ethos that sets out to reach high standards and to provide the support systems for this. It is a coherent department and there is a sense of unity about its work. The department is also well managed. It submits itself to rigorous self-analysis and evaluation. Uncomfortable or unpalatable findings are bravely confronted and shared openly as the basis for a strong will to improve performance. Advice is eagerly sought, reflection is encouraged, data is interpreted and initiatives are put into action and reviewed.
 94. The department is able to identify appropriate priorities for action, such as the current one for improvement to schemes of work and resources at Key Stage 3. The department's work supports whole-school developments well and is strongly committed to its initiatives. The department moves forward as a team and gains strength through its support for individual teachers and the concerted action of all its members. The monitoring of teaching is not yet thorough and systematic. This, together with the recent staffing difficulties resulting in classes having to be shared between teachers, leads to some unevenness in the performance of the department. Taking all the factors into account, the department shows a good level of improvement since the last inspection.

MATHEMATICS

95. Between 1996 and 1999 the performance of students in the National Curriculum tests at Key Stage 3, in terms of National Curriculum points scores, has been above the national average. Achievement of the higher levels, Level 6 and above, has however

been in line with the national average and below that for similar schools. In 2000 performance was also above the national average with a marked improvement in the attainment of the higher levels so that it was in line with similar schools. Overall standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are above the national average with no significant difference in the performance of girls or boys. The proportion of students achieving A*-G grades between 1996 and 2000 in the GCSE examinations has risen consistently and is above the national average. The performance of students in terms of achievement of A*-C grades has been in line with the national average until 2000 when results improved significantly and were well above average both nationally and in comparison with similar schools. Taken as a whole, standards at Key Stage 4 are above the national average and above the average for similar schools, with no significant long-term variation between achievement of boys or girls. Mathematics is a popular subject at advanced level although the numbers in particular options are often small for national comparisons. The aggregate results for each of the past three years do, however, show a strongly improving performance with 62 per cent of students in 2000 achieving grade A or B. The overall performance at advanced level is now well above average.

96. In Year 7 where students are initially taught in mixed ability groups the standards of work seen are in line with the school data for achievement on entry, which points to broadly average attainment. There is a full range of ability with a smaller group of higher achievers than normal in some classes. There is a strong focus on numeracy throughout the key stage with students acquiring confidence in working with and without a calculator and as a result all students can handle competently fractions, decimal numbers and metric measures. There is good progression in all aspects of the curriculum with strong emphasis on the use of mathematical notation. Students are expected to be able to explain their working and by Year 9 more able students are confident in handling algebraic expressions and solving simple equations. Less able students also handle symbols well but lack confidence with more complex expressions. There is an extension option in Year 9 for more able students that gives them an opportunity to explore topics not normally covered in the syllabus. All students, but especially those with special educational needs, make good progress through this key stage in relation to attainment on entry, and their standards are above average and in line with standards in national tests at the end of the key stage.
97. In Key Stage 4 standards of work are above average and in some areas well above average. There is a continuing emphasis on improving number skills and there are high expectations of all students of all abilities. Some challenging work with fractions, decimals and standard forms of number were seen in a Year 10 class of lower ability students. Full access to the mathematics curriculum at an appropriate level for all students is a strong feature of the work seen. Work in shape and space and in statistics builds well on the work in the previous key stage. Some excellent investigative work was seen in Year 11 students' folders showing students are able to write at length about their investigation. There was, however, evidence of students' skills in information and communication technology in only a few pieces of this work. The majority of students can handle algebraic concepts such as simultaneous equations well and less able students gain confidence in the formulation and manipulation of algebraic expressions. Students work well individually and in pairs and clearly enjoy work in mathematics. Given the attainment on entry to Year 10 the work seen is in keeping with the current well above average GCSE results and reflects good achievement for most students, including those with special educational needs.
98. In the sixth form all students have achieved well in their GCSE mathematics examination but the standard of work is even better and is very good in relation to students' prior attainment. Students display good levels of understanding across the full range of the A-level curriculum with some very good work seen in pure mathematics, applied mathematics and statistics. By Year 13 students have significant confidence in their mathematical abilities and their work is in line with, or better than, that indicated by the well above average A-level results.

99. The quality of teaching is predominantly good or better in the classes seen and never less than satisfactory. There is some exceptionally good teaching at A-level. Lessons are well planned with a variety of teaching strategies to make effective use of time. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject and teach with confidence. Teachers have a detailed understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their students, including those with special educational needs, and relationships in the classroom are good. As a result in most classes students are keen to participate in answering questions or explaining ideas and ask questions without hesitation. In the best lessons students' enthusiasm is well used to ensure that effective learning takes place. In a Year 9 class the competition between teams of more able students to measure and calculate the volume of a set of large regular solids produced accurate co-operative work of high quality under considerable time pressure. Many lessons start with a number game or a short series of questions based on previous work that gets the lesson off to a brisk start. In a Year 10 class of more able students the teacher used the answers to the previous night's homework sheet to extend students' abilities to explain their methods of calculation using integer powers. This resulted in some excellent discussion and in-depth understanding of the processes involved. Good use is made of additional in-class support in lessons, with lower achieving students particularly, for additional individual help when students are working on examples. In a Year 10 class of least able students dealing with fractions, the quality of one to one support possible with two teachers in the class was a major factor in the very good learning that was achieved. The good individual support provided by the teacher in some lessons, particularly those without additional in-class support, is sometimes however, at the expense of sustaining pace and challenge. Students work in a very supportive environment in the sixth form and the confidence gained by students by Year 13 is the result of the appropriate rigour and challenge of the teaching.
100. There is a very effective faculty policy to meet the needs of the most able students in mathematics both within the curriculum and by a diverse range of extra-curricular activities. These include competing in both the UK Schools, and Manchester Mathematics challenges, participating in the Saturday Master Classes and competitions at Liverpool University and involvement in a range of national and school based mathematics events. The result is a rich challenging environment in which to study mathematics. Four years ago the faculty recognised the exceptional ability of a gifted mathematics student in Year 7 and provided support for him to achieve a grade A* in his GCSE mathematics in Year 9. This student is continuing his studies in Year 11 having now achieved a grade A at A-level in mathematics.
101. The faculty is very well managed and very well led. The large group of teachers work well as a team sharing resources and good practice. There has been a clear focus in the department to develop teaching strategies to support the work in numeracy and to raise the quality of teaching. A great deal of effort has been devoted to improving the availability and use of assessment data and the faculty now monitors individual student achievement against targets based on their ability. The organisation and management of investigative work has been reviewed and current work by students underpins the curriculum effectively. General resources are satisfactory but mathematics rooms are dispersed on both the school sites. Teachers make good use of posters and displays of students' work in classrooms but there is little else to raise the spirit in the majority of rooms. Access to whole-class sets of computers to support work in mathematics is inadequate and there is no provision of appropriate information and communication technology to support teaching in the classroom. These aspects of the work in mathematics are not sufficiently embedded in the faculty schemes of work.
102. Since the last inspection the overall management of the faculty has improved. The emphasis on developing teaching strategies and promoting work in numeracy has resulted in improved teaching and an increase in the quality of number work with and

without calculators. Assessment data is linked to targets and used effectively. Standards have improved at both Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form and homework is now set regularly. Providing support for groups of students with considerable differences in ability that is not at the expense of pace and challenge remains, however, an issue the faculty needs to work on.

Numeracy

103. Standards of numeracy and mental arithmetic have improved since the last inspection and are good. Number skills develop well in Years 7 and 8 and in Year 9 able students display considerable skills in mental arithmetic. Lessons are often planned to start with a short number test or numeracy activity and these are popular with students. Students are encouraged to learn their multiplication tables and to use calculators only when really necessary and then to do so with care. This work in the mathematics faculty is not as yet supported by a whole-school policy for numeracy or a numeracy co-ordinator to establish links with other subject departments. There is, however, evidence of students applying their mathematical skills in other subject areas. In science at all key stages there is work showing students recording and tabulating data, calculating results from formulae and presenting these in graphs and charts. In the sixth-form science students interpret several sets of experimental data they have plotted on a common set of axes. They are less successful at applying mathematical models, with some students having difficulty working out the extension of an elastic spring. There is good promotion of mathematical skills in design and technology where students are accustomed to communicating through graphs, models and diagrams. Students weigh and measure accurately and can estimate relative size, proportion and volume. They collect, present and interpret data when researching a design project and there is good accurate work in drawing and cutting. In geography coursework there is effective use of bar charts and scatter graphs to illustrate data on rainfall, temperature, population and settlement. In fieldwork students can calculate and plot distances accurately. Good use is made of a variety of mathematical methods in business education. For example, students in Key Stage 4 are adept at plotting graphs to show 'break-even' points, that is the point at which a business will begin to make a profit. In information and communication technology students are confident in the processing of numerical data but have limited opportunities for demonstrating their skills in analysis. Key signatures in music are linked to note values and the relationship of note grouping and students are aware of number representation when studying binary and ternary form.

SCIENCE

104. Students achieve well in public examinations and standards are rising. In the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3, the attainment of boys and girls has been either above or well above national results for the last four years. In 2000, their overall performance, based on point scores, was above average but with a marked improvement in the proportions of students reaching the higher level from the previous year. The percentage of students attaining Level 5 and above in both 1999 and 2000 was well above the average of all schools, as was the percentage of students attaining Level 6 and above. In both those years, girls performed better than boys at Level 5 and above. At the higher levels there has been a different pattern, with boys attaining better than girls until this year. Results for fourteen-year-olds have been well above those for similar schools for 1999 and 2000. Teacher assessed levels for 2000 were very close to test results, but in 1999 there was some variation at Level 5 and above.
105. GCSE results showed a marked improvement in 2000 in comparison to 1999 and were well above national averages. In 1999 boys performed significantly better than

girls at A* to C and in relation to other subjects in the school. In 2000 this was reversed with girls attaining more of the higher grades but the gap between the genders narrowed to four per cent. At A-level, results are good, with all students taking physics and chemistry for the last four years attaining pass grades, the majority of them at grades A*-C. In biology, results have much improved since the last inspection with one hundred per cent pass rate in 1998 and 1999 and around ninety per cent in 1997 and 2000. As there is a fluctuation in the numbers taking each subject each year, identifying trends is difficult.

106. Inspection evidence indicates that overall attainment is above average at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form. In lessons, the majority of students are attaining at least in line with national expectations. Within mixed ability groups in Key Stage 3 there is evidence of attainment well above that expected nationally. One example seen was Year 8 students who could, from the formula of a chemical compound, name the chemical elements present and their quantities. At Key Stage 4 more students are attaining above national expectations than is the case nationally, with some very high attainment seen amongst students in the higher sets. Although in the lower sets students are often attaining below national expectations, their standards of work are not as low as usually seen in lower ability groups. In the sixth form students demonstrate very good attainment particularly in the complex practical experimental work seen being done in both physics and chemistry.
107. The learning and progress students achieve in science shows some variation and varies from group to group. Many are achieving better than expected particularly when teachers constantly challenge students' understanding by using activities designed to stretch them. One such example was seen in a Year 11 physics revision lesson where a rotating set of practical activities on the forces involved in starting and stopping, backed up with examination questions, meant students could consolidate their understanding and prepare well for the trial examinations. Overall, students with special educational needs achieve above expectations throughout the school. However, there are instances when some students with learning difficulties do not achieve as well as they could because resources they are provided with are not suitable, such as lengthy text passages. They make good progress when taught in small groups or given resources matched to their needs. This was evident in Key Stage 4 where small groups of students are taught by a specialist teacher, working towards a Certificate of Achievement in science. In the minority of lessons where higher attaining students are achieving below that expected it is because they are not given sufficiently challenging activities such as copying and completing texts.
108. The quality of teaching overall in both key stages is good and very good in the sixth form. Three-quarters of all lessons are good or very good with the highest proportion of these in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and teach within their science specialism at both GCSE and A-level. This allows them to extend and challenge students' understanding particularly in relation to theoretically advanced ideas. The programmes of study for the National Curriculum are covered well but teachers do not always place enough emphasis on developing the various skills of investigative science within all practical activities. Teachers plan the lessons well and share the aims and outcomes with students so that they are clear what is expected. A team of four technicians works very effectively to support practical activities on both sites. This support is particularly important given the movement of teachers between buildings and sessions. The very best lessons are characterised by teachers setting a brisk pace, keeping the interest of all with a variety of tasks designed to challenge intellectual understanding, and where students are constantly praised and encouraged to achieve. This ensures that all students learn effectively and was clearly shown in a Year 8 lesson where students were learning about the dangers of smoking and its effect on breathing organs. However, in some lessons, particularly where there are students of different ability levels, teachers do not ensure that the needs of all are catered for. Sometimes the higher attaining

students are not challenged sufficiently by the tasks given whilst those with special educational needs do not have work matched to their needs and this leads to some unproductive time. Students are clear what is expected of them particularly in terms of application and behaviour. This results in well-ordered lessons and safe working in practical sessions. Homework is designed to build on the lesson and includes some specifically produced homework booklets for students to use. However, as most tasks are written there is some lack of variety and there is scope for development of different activities such as preparation of talks or questionnaires. This could also help to improve opportunities for using the skills of speaking and writing in an extended manner, both of which are under-developed at present. Students are able to answer questions confidently and eloquently but are given too few opportunities to present their ideas to their peers in a formalised way. Whilst there are writing frames to help with the reporting of scientific investigations for lower attaining students, there is scope for more use of these for all students, together with key word lists displayed.

109. Since the appointment of the head of department three years ago, the department has moved forward considerably. He leads a team of committed staff whose work reflects the school aims and policies put in place are being translated into practice. There is a clear homework policy that helps consistency and this is an improvement since the last inspection. There is some good use seen of students' self-assessment and target setting but these are not used widely enough. Much work has been done to develop detailed schemes of work matched to new GCSE and A-level courses. Further work is needed to look at the scheme for Key Stage 3; in particular in terms of resources and teaching methods for the most able as guidance for these is currently lacking. Specific opportunities for developing cross-curricular aspects such as literacy, information and communication technology and spiritual and moral education are also not identified. There is now an information and communication technology based A-level Physics course. Other than this, however, the use of computers as an aid to learning has not improved much since the last inspection but is a direct consequence of the shortage of hardware available for students to use in laboratories. The range of laboratories on both sites provide a stimulating environment for students as there is much high quality and colourful work on display. However, the travelling between buildings by staff means not only do they not have ownership of a particular laboratory but also that teaching time is reduced considerably over the year.

ART AND DESIGN

110. At the end of Key Stage 3, standards are above national expectations for the majority of students, as teacher assessments for Year 9 students in 2000 show. By the end of Key Stage 4, standards are well above the national average, with nearly nine-tenths of students gaining grades at A*-C against a national average of two-thirds in 2000. Girls achieved better results than boys did overall, though both achieve better results than the national average for their group. Over the last three years the GCSE results show an improvement, with the proportion of passes at grades A*-C increasing to its present high level. In the sixth form standards are very high, and in the 2000 A-level examinations all students achieved success at grades A-D. On the GNVQ Advanced Level course nearly seven-tenths of students achieved distinctions, and nearly one-third achieved merits.
111. In the work seen in the school, at the end of Key Stage 3 standards are above average. Students are able to work with confidence in a variety of materials, including pencil and coloured pencil, paint, collage, ceramics and textiles. All work seen is supported by the study of a range of artists and art movements, including William Morris, the Impressionists and Surrealists, and the work of a range of non-western cultures. These include Japanese, Aboriginal and Hindu art. Colour is used well, and there are some sensitive drawings to be seen in coloured pencil. These are based on the study of flower forms and are informed by the work of Georgia O'Keefe.

112. At the end of Key Stage 4 standards are well above average, with some very good constructions seen which are made of card and paint. These demonstrate a lively approach to the study of art and show a very good understanding of the work of artists such as Roy Lichtenstein, Franz Marc and Vincent Van Gogh. In the sixth form standards are very high, and some exciting large-scale canvases are seen, informed by the work of Claude Monet, which were painted in the open air. Other work of a very high standard can be seen in the strong graphite drawings produced on the GNVQ Advanced Level course, which are bold in execution. These are based on the exploration of natural forms, and the final large-scale drawings have a rich surface and a strong impact.
113. Achievement in art and design overall is very good when compared to how well students perform when they enter the school, when their skills in the subject are about average. At Key Stage 3 achievement is good, and students gain a greater knowledge of the world of art and design, and make good gains in their drawing skills. Achievement is very good at Key Stage 4 and students learn to work in a wide variety of materials and processes, and make very good gains in their ability to use techniques to achieve very successful outcomes. As a result there are many examples of very good work in drawing and painting, textiles, ceramics and graphic design. In the sixth form students gain a greater appreciation of the wider context of art and design work, and rise to the intellectual challenges posed by a consideration of more recent artistic movements, including conceptual art. Some impressive personal work is seen in this area, which is thought provoking and challenging for the viewer.
114. Students with special educational needs achieve very well as a result of very good use of support assistants and very good individual coaching by teachers. This was seen in a lesson on making hats, where the students made very good gains in cutting and sewing techniques, and were able to achieve very successful outcomes.
115. Teaching and learning are very good overall. In the lessons seen, all were good or better. At Key Stage 3, teaching and learning are good and in the best lessons there are well-structured lesson introductions. These introductions recap on previous learning, encourage high standards by using well prepared examples, and give focused advice on the techniques which students will need to be successful in the lesson. This was seen in a lesson in textiles where students were able to absorb the knowledge they needed to use cutting and sewing techniques creatively, and effective learning was the result. Another strength of the teaching seen at this key stage is the good match of materials and methods to the ability level of the students. This was seen in a lesson on ceramics where students made good gains in their ability to roll and cut slabs of clay.

116. At Key Stage 4 teaching and learning is very good and a key feature is the high quality of individual advice and guidance given by the teacher. This was seen in a lesson on composition work, based on studies of peppers and tomatoes. The teacher's very good knowledge of the expressive possibilities of paint enabled very good advice to be given on the painting process. Students were then able to use transparent and opaque passages in their work, and very good learning was the result. This has a positive effect on students' attitudes, building good levels of motivation and setting high expectations. In the sixth form teaching and learning is very good, and a strong feature of the teaching is the development of very good teacher-student relationships. This results in the creation of a very confident and positive atmosphere within which exploration and experimentation can take place, and standards rise as a result. This was seen in a project based on developing compositions from direct observation of animal skulls. Here the teacher was able to give encouraging and knowledgeable advice, while still addressing the weaknesses in the work. Because of this the students knew exactly what they needed to do to improve the standard of their painting and were able to do so with enthusiasm. This produced excellent attitudes and learning. Another strength of the teaching in the sixth form is the very good use of questioning which extends students' knowledge and makes them think further. This was seen in a lesson where students were presenting their research work in illustrated talks to the rest of the class. The teacher was able to use questioning to explore links between the work of Duchamp, Andy Warhol, and Punk Rock images, and this increased the depth of the students' knowledge and challenged their thinking.
117. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. There is a shared commitment to success and improvement and a strong sense of teamwork. Standards have improved because the quality of teaching and learning has been monitored and developed, and there is a supportive ethos, which means that staff can effectively discuss strategies for improvement. In this way the management of the subject has had a very good impact on raising standards. In addition the subject leader is a very good model of teaching, and has very good knowledge of the value of visual education in its widest sense. Because of this art and design makes a very good contribution to the cultural development of the students in the school, and creative activity is valued and celebrated. Display and storage facilities, however, are in need of improvement. This is because the very high standard work cannot be used to its full potential in creating a high quality learning environment. Good use is made of information and communication technology to support, for example, students' research work and in graphics. Good use is also made of sketchbooks to help students record their observations and ideas and develop them further.
118. Since the last inspection improvement overall has been very good. There has been steady improvement in the standards achieved in the school especially at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. This is because the department works as a team and the curriculum is under review and improvement all the time, and as a result a very good range of courses at GCSE is available. The quality of teaching and learning has also improved, and its consistently high quality has played an important part in raising standards.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

119. Students in all areas do well when considering their prior attainment. Results have been variable over recent years with a significant improvement seen in the 2000 results with students taking the graphics course performing particularly well; 88.0 per cent A*-C grades were achieved with its first entry in 2000. The 1999 GCSE results were below the national average for child development, in line with national averages in three-dimensional design overall and for girls in catering with boys' performance being below the national average when compared to all maintained secondary schools. Low entries at A-level make comparisons difficult but the 1999 results were

better than 2000 with all students achieving a pass within the A-E grade range. The department performs favourably when compared to the school's own results. The use of target setting continues to be a feature in helping to raise standards.

120. Current attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is at the national expectation overall with a good proportion of students achieving above. Girls usually perform better than boys, particularly in terms of gaining the higher levels, that is Level 6 or above. Good improvement through the key stage is evident in students' design folders that show a well developed range of presentational skills to illustrate the work, including the use of information and communication technology. In their clock project, students in Year 9 used freehand sketching, collage and information and communication technology to produce good quality designs and images for the clock face. Good clear drawings were also used to good effect to illustrate ideas in a Year 9 food technology project using filo pastry. Overall, students' achievements are good and sometimes very good. Students' practical skills are well developed and their skills in solving design problems are mainly good. However, lack of provision for control and electronics means that students' knowledge and skills in these areas are underdeveloped.
121. Current attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is above national averages overall. Levels of achievement are good or very good in all areas but particularly so in design and graphics. Design folders and coursework folios show a broad range of presentational skills and techniques including colour, shading, freehand sketching, commercial material, photographs and information and communication technology to illustrate the work and communicate ideas. The majority of students' folders also demonstrate good research work and analysis of initial ideas in relation to the design brief set is often good. All students are expected and encouraged to perform to the best of their capability and there are only rare occasions when the work does not meet the high standards expected. Practical work, including modelling, is of a good standard. Modelling is well used as a tool to evaluate and test ideas for development. Students' written evaluations of their work are perceptive.
122. Current attainment in the sixth form is in line with course expectations and achievement is good overall with some interesting solutions being investigated in Year 12 using various materials and processes in the food packaging project and similarly in the Year 13 project investigating a collapsible and transportable mountain bike ramp.
123. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall at both key stages and in the sixth form. The amount of satisfactory teaching is greater at Key Stage 3 with a minority of satisfactory teaching at Key Stage 4. The better lessons have good pace, and subject knowledge is used well to expand on or develop ideas. In these lessons, use of questioning is well managed and clear objectives for learning are set. These features were seen in a Year 7 lesson where students were investigating a hot savoury snack using pitta bread, a Year 9 lesson emphasising accuracy and precision in the clock project and in a Year 11 lesson where students were looking at the value of play in child development. In these lessons, students were kept well on task and there was a brisk pace to learning. In addition, teachers used their good subject knowledge to make well-judged interventions in students' work in order to guide their thinking and refine their skills. Good use is made of interesting, relevant and stimulating material to help students to develop their own ideas as well as to develop and extend their own skills through analysis and examination of how other designers have developed their work. For example, in a Year 10 lesson students were helped very effectively to improve and develop their own graphical skills by particular reference to cartoonists and graphic artists. In a Year 11 lesson, students used the stimulus of famous architects and designers in their projects to help them develop their own work. The few satisfactory lessons have many good features but sometimes lack real pace, classroom strategies are inappropriate or time is used inefficiently. As a result, students make only satisfactory progress in these lessons, in contrast to the good progress made in most lessons.

124. Students, including those with special educational needs, make good progress and increase their learning in all areas. Learning is further supported by the positive attitudes and response shown by students in the majority of lessons. Students are interested in the work and contribute well to lessons. Students are confident orally and written work is usually neatly presented. On occasions students have difficulty in recalling previous work and there are instances of student inattention and distraction.
125. Assessment procedures are in place and good use is made of various statistical evidence to guide target setting and raise standards. The system does not, however, include National Curriculum levels at Key Stage 3 or link realistically to students' perception of examination grades at Key Stage 4. Marking is consistent and the homework set is effectively linked to classwork or coursework.
126. The curriculum however does not cover all the programmes of study at Key Stage 3 and provision for electronics and control technology is underdeveloped. At Key Stage 4 statutory requirements are not fully met as all students do not take a design and technology subject at present.
127. Staff work together as a team and strong links with the art department are a feature of the area. Accommodation is good in the upper school but rather cramped and in need of upgrading in the lower school. Technician help is available on a part-time basis. Safety lines are not marked on the floor areas around machinery in the workshops and, hence, students do not have a clear guide on where they should be positioning themselves, especially when waiting to use machinery.
128. Since the last inspection resources have improved, particularly in information and communication technology, the teaching areas are now of a good standard of cleanliness, examination performance continues to improve overall and some aspects of the accommodation improved on the upper school site with new windows and heating system installed. The quality of prepared worksheets using information and communication technology is now a strong feature of the area. However, despite the improvements, not enough use is made of computers, particularly at the lower school site.

GEOGRAPHY

129. Standards in geography have improved since the last report when they were below average at the end of Key Stage 4. At the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is average. During the last three years the difference between standards in the school and national standards, as assessed by the school, has decreased although a smaller proportion of students reached the higher attainment levels in 2000.
130. Since the last report fewer students are entered for GCSE and over the last three years the number of students gaining higher GCSE grades A*-C has remained below the national average. GCSE performance has been lower in geography than in other subjects although the 2000 results were an improvement on the year before and there are clear signs that the trend of below average results is now being reversed. The number of students entered for A-level has fluctuated. The majority are successful. A-level grades have improved since the last report and are now similar to those found nationally.

131. In Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form achievement is satisfactory given the students' prior attainment.
132. Throughout Key Stage 3, the standard of work in lessons and from the samples of students' work scrutinised is often above average where students make particularly good use of their mapping skills and understanding of geographical patterns through urban fieldwork enquiries. Higher attainers analyse data well to consider how the consequences of location and the level of development can affect people's chances of survival following an earthquake. The majority understand and explain clearly the consequences of such a disaster and girls recall how to draw accurate scatter graphs. Progress is often good. A small minority find it more difficult to extend their notes or to explain the consequences of an earthquake. A group of students with special educational needs in Year 9 work within and above their abilities to understand how people can be responsible for hazards whilst natural disasters are less predictable. Many in the group find the writing difficult but struggle to achieve their targets successfully. There are too few opportunities for using information and communication technology.
133. At Key Stage 4, most of the students who have opted for geography study for the GCSE qualification. Their attainment is close to average in Year 11 and above average in the Year 10 GCSE groups, thus indicating a further improvement in the standards being attained from the GCSE results of 2000. Ordnance survey map skills are re-visited in Year 11. Students interpret symbols accurately and higher attainers explain clearly why the flood plains are retained for non-residential use whilst lower attainers struggle to recognise different street patterns.
134. Year 10 GCSE students have a good knowledge of drainage patterns and flooding. They can extract relevant information from a newspaper article or make notes from video well. Many explain the physical and human consequences of severe flooding accurately as higher attainers have a good understanding of the vocabulary and lower attainers ask for clarification of more difficult words.
135. The one year humanities group in Year 10 is for students having special educational needs. Students recognise some advantages of different forms of transport although their written work is poor and often difficult to read. One boy had a good understanding of the comparative effects on the environment from the use of different forms of transport for different cargoes.
136. At A-level students work effectively towards course requirements. In Year 13 they appreciate the influence of Britain as a former colonial power and the significance of the physical location of Calcutta. Students of higher ability give extended and factually correct oral answers to explain the improvements in shanty towns although some answers are too short. In Year 12 the students can identify features of desertification and annotate the topology from photographs to demonstrate clear logical thinking and research skills. This conceptual thinking is indicative of improving standards.
137. The quality of teaching is good overall being good or better in almost two thirds of the lessons. Only on occasion is it unsatisfactory. There is some very good teaching in all key stages where high expectations are evident in the good quantity of work being undertaken. In these lessons, teachers make the best use of all available time for students' learning.
138. Specialist teachers use their very good knowledge and understanding of the subject to plan lessons very thoroughly. This is effective in providing students with the opportunity to make relevant oral contributions. They enjoy the challenge and learn from brisk and probing question and answer sessions. The teaching involves frequent checks on the students' understanding of the purpose of graphs and the analysis of geographical data. For example, in Year 12 students learn to interpret the detail of a desert landscape from a photograph and explain the processes of exfoliation very well.
139. Where teaching is satisfactory there is not always enough consideration given to the

use of day-to-day assessment to meet the needs of individual students. The behaviour of students is good and very good in response to good teaching where students are well motivated and know what is expected of them. In the better lessons the teaching encourages the students to empathise, for example, with the problems of disease following an earthquake. Meaningful homework is regularly set.

140. Since the last inspection report there have been a number of staff changes and the department has been extensively reviewed by the school and the local education authority. A new head of department has been appointed this term. He has already established himself as a strong leader of the department. The priorities are very well considered and now provide a very clear educational direction for the subject. The initial changes have rightly focused upon the National Curriculum at Key Stage 3. There is a strong determination to raise standards particularly at GCSE for borderline C/D candidates. These changes are well supported by the teachers in the department and the senior staff. Funding has been provided to improve the level of resources criticised in the last report.

HISTORY

141. Students' ability at intake is broadly average, but with only a modest number of students in the higher ability range. By the end of Year 9, however, their level of attainment is well above expectations indicating a high level of progress. The school's assessment evidence shows an improving trend in students' achievement between Years 7 and 9 especially at the higher National Curriculum levels, and this is sustained through Years 10 and 11 so that by the end of Year 11 attainment by students is also well above expectations. The proportion of students achieving A*-C grades has improved year on year since 1997 and in 2000 was above the national average with 100 per cent passing at grades A*-G. This level of success is continued into the sixth form and at the end of Year 13, standards continue to be above the national average. In the GCE A-level the number of entries, although modest, is rising and the pass rate at A-E has been consistently high over the last three years. In 2000 it was above the national average for all schools in history and 100 per cent in politics. The lack of sufficient numbers of higher ability students is reflected in the below average pass rates at the highest GCSE and A-level grades. However, students achieve very well at all stages given their prior attainment.
142. Students in Key Stage 3 are making very good progress in their knowledge of history and in using the key skills, which help them to understand it. They are learning to use documentary evidence well in those years, to build a foundation that is extended in Key Stage 4, where they test documents on the Black Death for reliability and utility. One higher ability student questioned the authorship of a document and a lower ability student criticised very constructively the unnecessary level of detail included in an answer by one of his more able peers. This progression in analytical competence is apparent in the understanding of documentary provenance by students in the sixth form. They use it very effectively to analyse Henry VII's modification of the Plantagenet system of financial administration to give the king a better level of control over expenditure and to compare and contrast the conflicting attitudes of Protestant groups at the time of the Counter-Reformation.
143. To achieve that high quality of learning students are required to exert considerable intellectual and physical effort and the rigour of their teaching drives this, even for those less inclined to make that effort. The quality of teaching in the great majority of lessons is good and in almost two-thirds it is very good if not excellent. Because teachers have a caring and committed attitude, relationships are very good and as a result class management is very good and positive working environments established. It is inclusive of all abilities and of those who are disinclined to give of their best. Lessons are well prepared in relation to teachers' planned outcomes. Excellent understanding about, and enthusiasm for, the subject are key features of

teaching as well as teachers' detailed knowledge and experience of examination requirements. There is a balance of challenging and innovative activities conducted at a lively pace, which sustains the pressure on students to concentrate on fulfilling their teachers' high expectations. In Key Stage 3 this may take the form of demanding question and answer sessions. In Year 11 it was apparent in a lesson where students graded sample examination answers on public health in London in the nineteenth century and then explained the reasons for their mark allocations.

144. At the sixth form level it takes the form of rigorous debate, in which it is evident that students have not only understood the topic under discussion but are familiar with the differing opinions of historians when it comes to making a judgement. Dynamic and motivating approaches bring out the higher qualities in the few more exceptional students, who respond with interest and enthusiasm to the inspirational lead.
145. Although students have good listening and speaking skills their written work at all levels is marred by too many instances of poor English expression, incorrect punctuation and spelling errors. At the lower levels of ability they read slowly and hesitantly. Despite attempts to rectify these problems, teachers would be helped by a coherent whole-school policy on literacy, which is currently lacking.
146. The leadership and management of the department are positive and influential on its work. Relationships between the staff in the department and within the humanities faculty, of which history is a part, are strongly co-operative and constructively self-critical. There is a shared vision and commitment to excellence that reflects the interactive role of the school development team. Assessment procedures are thorough but the results could be used more positively to inform planning. Programmes of study are also very good but need to be reviewed to incorporate fieldwork and the use of information and communication technology which is underdeveloped in the department. Accommodation is a problem in that the few suited history rooms are good but there are too many teachers having to teach in scattered locations. This affects teachers and if it does not affect results, it is at the expense of the additional stress it places on teachers. Forward planning is strong as is everyday organisation and it has responded well to the headteacher's sense of purpose and initiatives for future development. In no small way is this quality of management responsible for the improved and improving results in both history and politics.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

147. Although attainment at intake is average, at the end of Year 9 it is well above national expectations. This is an improving trend especially at the higher National Curriculum levels. Standards at the start of Year 7 are variable. A minority of students has very poor keyboard skills and this is evident in their unfamiliarity with the keyboard and the basic features of applications programs. There is, however, evidence of a steady progression through Years 7 to 9 so that by the end of Year 9 achievement is very good. This progress continues through Years 10 and 11, during which achievement is very high and at the end of Year 11, attainment levels are well above expectations. In 2000 the proportion of students passing GCSE information and communication technology at grades A*-C was significantly above the national average thereby continuing a generally upward trend. The attainment of boys was better than girls in 1997 and 2000 but in 1998 and 1999 the girls did better than the boys. In business studies, results in the GCSE have fluctuated since 1997 but always above the national average at grades A*-C and well above in 2000. Again the relative performance of boys and girls fluctuates but here the girls have outperformed the boys in the last two years. Attainment at the end of Year 13 is also well above expectations and recent advanced level pass rates at grades A-E in computing and information and communication technology have been at 100 per cent, with above average passes at the higher A/B grades. The same very high level of success has

been recorded in advanced level business studies in every year since 1997.

148. In Key Stage 3, students effectively learn how to use the main features of the standard applications, such as wordprocessors and spreadsheets, and by the end of the key stage they are competent users of these programs. They can select software appropriate to the demands of their assignments and move between different programs with ease to build up documents containing component features of two or more programs. For example, students competently create identity cards with digitally captured photographs, business cards and commercial stationery and access the internet to research assignments. Their competence is well above average and this enables them to tackle GCSE coursework with confidence. In developing a shop's accounting system they are addressing work-related projects and seeing the practical application of their skills, creating the logo, letterheads, invoicing system and sales accounts structure. In another project, a school's examination results were listed and then analysed with colour graphics used to illustrate progression and trends. This continues into advanced level studies, which are equally commercially realistic, many of them being coded in an appropriate programming language. Students analyse difficulties against clients' requirements and, for example, devise a system that will audit a university's housing stock and display its availability or a stock management system that might be applied effectively in a commercial warehouse.
149. Achievement at this level indicates very good learning and teaching. Students are interested and enthusiastic. They make a strong intellectual effort in most lessons and sustain a high level of concentration. They do this very much as a result of the high quality of their teaching, which is good in the substantial majority of lessons and very good in almost a half. In these lessons relationships between teachers and students are good, subject expertise is assured and this establishes an atmosphere of control, respect and application. The strong subject expertise is complemented by a forensic analysis of assessor's comments and exam board reports, and what is learned from these is integrated into lesson plans. Consequently Year 13 students learn by assessing previously marked assignments to grade themselves according to board criteria, which they then analyse with their teachers. Lessons are well prepared to detailed programmes of study and they contain a balance of clearly outlined activities that are pursued at a brisk pace, with time targets used to sustain that pace. Students are well aware of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. There is a commitment by the teachers to get students to succeed, especially those who have already experienced failure, in some cases repeatedly so, and expectations of students are high and work is challenging, especially the GCSE and A-level coursework. The trend of recent results bears tribute to its success. There is strong discussion in theory lessons and challenging questions are asked of students in the introductory elements of many of their lessons at all levels. On the single occasion when teaching was less than satisfactory, control was not strong enough and there was insufficient work to occupy students purposefully for the complete lesson.
150. The management of information and communication technology is diffuse but very successful. Leadership is strong and the joint planning is positive and forward-looking. Teachers work together well and are constructively self-critical in their quest to meet their own and the school's aims. Sound development plans are looking to redevelop programmes of study to ensure a greater degree of continuity between Years 7 to 13, and the accreditation of skills at the end of Year 9, and for those who do not choose computer-based subjects in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The resources for learning are mostly good, although room S1 is unsuitable for classes of more than 15 students. There are, however, insufficient computer resources at present to support in full the use of information and communication technology across the curriculum, which at present is underdeveloped. The current number of support staff is adequate to meet current needs, but with the anticipated increased level of computer-based teaching and learning it is likely to be insufficient. Many of these issues are already

featured in the development plans, which reflect the headteacher's initiatives for future development and school aims. Planning is strong and everyday administration is thorough and as such bears a responsibility for the high level of its students' achievements.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

151. In 1999, GCSE results at A*-C in French were above the national average. The proportion of grades A*-C being achieved has improved some twenty per cent since the previous inspection when the rate was slightly below the national average. The latest results for 2000 compare well with those of other subjects in the school. Results in German were well below the national average whereas they were above at the time of the previous inspection. The 2000 results were significantly better and were close to national benchmarks. These results compare unfavourably with those in many other subjects. Girls outperform boys by a slightly bigger margin than is found nationally.
152. At GCE A-level in French, the number of entries has declined by more than a half since 1998. The overall pass rate of one hundred per cent is above the national average. Most students achieved higher grades. German entries have also declined significantly since 1998 when all nine students were successful, mostly with higher grades. The overall pass rate has dropped below one hundred per cent but successful candidates have usually achieved good grades. Both languages have recruited higher numbers for AS-level.
153. Attainment near the end of Key Stage 3 is average. Students are becoming accustomed to French or German being the main vehicle of communication in the classroom. However, in some lessons, French and German vocabulary is too readily translated into English. Thus students have insufficient opportunity to develop the very important skill of deducing meaning by hearing further examples or explanations in the foreign language. The resultant lack of confidence in listening skills clearly affects the ability in speaking because students lack practice in manipulating sentence structures. The department has recognised this and has targeted listening and speaking as a priority area for improvement. This was evident in a Year 7 German class where enthusiastic students enjoyed their success in utilising the vocabulary and structure of questions as the basis for their answers. Written work is predominantly good as basic grammar is systematically introduced. Thus the department is making a significant contribution to literacy standards in the school. Most Year 9 students produce a considerable amount and variety of written work including quite lengthy descriptions of familiar topics. The difference between higher and lower attaining students lies mainly in the number of mistakes made, in the range of expression and in the ability to manipulate foreign sentence patterns. In classes seen there was some private reading whilst reading aloud was used effectively to boost oral confidence and to check pronunciation and intonation.
154. Attainment near the end of Key Stage 4 is above average in French and average in German. The deficiencies in listening and speaking still persist in some sets. In particular, many second set students do not achieve their full potential because of this weakness. However, a top set Year 11 French were able to deduce unfamiliar vocabulary from further examples offered in French by their teacher. They knew their sentence patterns and were consequently confident and accurate speakers on practised topics. The most confident attempted to express new ideas based on their previous learning. Standards in writing are mainly good although sometimes English translations are unnecessarily included. The emphasis on grammar is clearly seen throughout the key stage and students are well prepared for the writing tasks in the GCSE examinations. This approach should also facilitate the transition from GCSE to AS and A-level. In an increasing number of books recent examples can be found of stress being laid on the correct usage of words within standard sentence structures

rather than being written down in isolation and out of context.

155. Attainment in the sixth form is varied but good overall. In French, Year 12 students try hard to speak without making many mistakes, and usually do so to a good standard. Written work in French and German also shows good standards of accuracy and includes a range of exercises in advanced grammar. A Year 12 French class tackled the grammatical analysis of a French sonnet with fair success. In German, students are reasonably fluent and keen to communicate. Some of the chosen A-level topics are interesting and directly relevant to contemporary France and Germany. Work files contain copious amounts of work. The Internet is well utilised as a source for research and information.
156. In relation to their prior attainment, most students at Key Stages 3 and 4 achieve as well as expected and progress well, although, as already explained, there is some underachievement around the C/D borderline at GCSE. Achievement in the sixth form is good. Homework is well used to sustain progress. It links recent and new learning. Lower attainers often make good progress during lessons but forget quickly. Higher attainers also have good powers of retention over time. Progress in the sixth form is usually good. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. They make good progress when learning support is available in a lesson and when oral rather than written work is the main activity. This was clearly evident in a Year 8 German class where good progress was made thanks to the combined skills of the teacher, a support teacher and a classroom assistant. Teachers recognise and plan effectively for the needs of their students as they know the content of individual education plans. They monitor progress actively and supply additional or different learning materials where necessary.
157. Teaching has improved since the last inspection. No lesson was unsatisfactory. Just over half were good, one third were very good. The lesson observation process is clearly beginning to disseminate best practice. Features of good teaching in this department include a lively, very active introduction of learning materials which gets the lesson off to a brisk start and captures students' attention. Teachers are constantly monitoring progress. They prompt, guide and advise individuals, pairs and groups. They teach extensively in the foreign language in which they are fluent although some, at times, lapse too readily into English. This has adverse effects on listening and consequently, speaking skills. Others however are skilled at finding ways of introducing new vocabulary without leaving French or German. Once understood the new vocabulary is often practised in pairs where students help and encourage each other. In better lessons, teachers employ a wide range of activities and tasks which ensures ample practice in listening, speaking, reading and writing. They insist on full answers so that students become conversant with foreign language patterns which motivates students to speak at length.
158. The quality of teacher produced learning materials is very good. This was not the case at the previous inspection. Lessons are invariably well planned and well structured so that initial momentum is sustained throughout. This enables students to derive maximum learning benefit from lessons except when lesson time is eroded by intersite travel. Teachers often share aims and objectives of lessons to reaffirm a working partnership with their students. Students respond by concentrating well and staying focused. Their behaviour is good. Some teachers summarise the key points at lesson end by way of revision and to illustrate the progress made. Homework is then set to reinforce gains made in lessons and to prepare for new learning next lesson.
159. The curriculum is rich. There is opportunity to study two languages up to GCSE and beyond. From September 2001, the school will be offering gifted linguists the opportunity to study up to three languages. Occasionally, timetabling problems cause unsuitable timings as in the present Year 9 second language provision. Assessment is thoroughly detailed and all students have targets to meet which are regularly

reviewed. However, not all students are aware of their National Curriculum levels. Examination results are analysed in full detail so that weaknesses can be addressed in the departmental action plan.

160. Departmental leadership, which has changed since the previous inspection, is good. The whole department shares a commitment to improvement and responsibilities for various aspects are shared. This engenders a productive team spirit. The use of information and communication technology in language learning is not yet fully developed. The department has tabled a bid to replace its antiquated language laboratory with an up-to-date provision which could usefully incorporate satellite TV and computer-assisted language learning. Resources are now at adequate levels but accommodation is far from ideal. Apart from the obvious difficulties of the split site situation, there is too much teaching in unsuitable non-specialist rooms all over the school. This inevitably causes some inconvenience and inefficiency for both staff and students.

MUSIC

161. In 2000, 94 per cent of candidates obtained A*-C grades at GCSE, this is well above the national average of 70 per cent. This is a further improvement on the upward trend of previous years with girls and boys attaining similar results.
162. A-level results over the last three years are equally encouraging and show a similar pattern of improvement. As only a small number of candidates study music at A-level, it is not possible to make significant statistical comparisons.
163. At the end of Year 9, standards in work seen during the inspection are average overall with some good and very good areas of work. Standards at the end of Year 11 and at the end of the sixth form are above average and in some cases well above. These high standards are the direct result of teachers' enthusiasm, efforts and high expectations. Students have a good knowledge and understanding of musical skills and concepts. They are enabled to refine and practise these on a regular basis. Students learn about the musical elements and then incorporate them into their work. Musical vocabulary and literacy is developed through the use of key words for each piece of work. Their prose writing about instruments, composers and musical forms is detailed and well presented. Students in a Year 7 class demonstrated clearly their understanding of ensemble and performance skills. They enjoyed their work and took pleasure in their performances. They encouraged each other displaying good co-operation and an understanding of the importance of each part. Classes in Key Stage 3 do not have sufficient opportunities to record their work in progress as well as the final performance. Regular opportunity to do so would allow students to reflect critically and enable improvements to be made. Lower attaining students and those with special educational needs enjoy their lessons and make satisfactory progress. Better progress is hampered by the lack of a wide enough variety of tasks to help them learn by taking smaller but more sustained and regular steps forward in the development of their knowledge, skills and understanding.

164. Students' musical progress through Key Stage 4 is good. They build upon a solid musical foundation, which enables them to develop their performances and compositions. Students discuss their work confidently and use musical language effectively. Their notebooks are informative and are carefully monitored. Compositions show good understanding of musical forms and use imaginative rhythmic styles and instrumental combinations. Students are encouraged to develop musical ideas using composers' work as their inspiration. Students are well aware of their strengths and weaknesses. They work well in pairs and small groups and are supportive of each other. This continues into the sixth form where two students were rehearsing an extract from Bach's 'Double Violin Concerto' showing maturity and understanding of the piece. Insufficient opportunities are available to introduce appropriate computer equipment in order to aid all students with composition work. This would be of particular benefit to those who find standard notation difficult.
165. Teaching observed was good overall. In two thirds of lessons it is good or very good. No teaching was seen that was less than satisfactory. Lessons are carefully planned and enthusiastically delivered. Teachers make good use of personal musical experiences to amplify and describe concepts. Demonstrations are clear and students understand the musical effect to be gained by correct technique. For example using all five fingers on the keyboards to play smoother flowing passages of quaver notes. Students are involved in the lessons. Class management is strong, lessons move with good pace. Teachers' expectations are shared with students. An encouraging and humorous atmosphere prevails in the department. Students enjoy being in the lessons and work sensibly when moving equipment. The layout of desks in one of the teaching rooms poses a health and safety hazard to teachers and students when using keyboards due to the many trailing leads produced. Re-design of the layout could provide a solution to this problem.
166. Good use is made of the assessment of students' attainment and progress especially at Key Stages 4 and 5. This helps to clarify what they need to do in order to improve and for standards to be monitored throughout the department.
167. Management and leadership of the department are good with a clear commitment to high standards. Teachers work well as a team and share good practise, through regular reviews. Departmental documentation is clear, detailed and informative. Since the last inspection the department has made satisfactory progress. Examination results have continued to improve and teaching remains good overall. Standards of students in Key Stage 3 are still adversely affected by the amount of curriculum time lost when moving from lower to upper school. The issue of accommodation is, thus, still giving cause for concern. In addition, the joint use by the music department of the rooms in the adjacent leisure centre cause concern as there are some health and safety issues, brought to the notice of the school, in this use. For example, there is a window which goes below floor level but there is no indication if the glass used is toughened or not. In addition, some rooms are not suitable for use by either staff or students, due to the poor condition of the flooring and fabric of the rooms. This does not give a pleasant or constructive learning environment.
168. The departments' strength is the number and variety of extra-curricular opportunities provided, which promote high standards of musicianship. These ensembles encourage students' esteem and co-operation. The regular musical events are well publicised and celebrated throughout the school. Students at Knutsford High School are provided with a rich and varied diet of musical experiences.

Performing arts

169. The standards attained by students in dance and drama lessons are always in line with and often above expectations for students by the end of Year 9. Overall, their standards of work are good compared to their prior attainment. These achievements

translate into successful results at GCSE and A-level. In the GCSE examinations for 2000, the results for dance were very good with a very high proportion of students gaining a grade A*-C. Those for drama were also high with well above average proportion of students gaining a GCSE grade A*-C. A dance club for boys has resulted in boys taking dance at GCSE for the first time this year. At A-level, results were also good in dance and theatre studies, but numbers are too small to make viable comparisons with national averages. Music is used effectively in dance and drama lessons to bring together a broad range of performing skills. As a result, students experience considerable success in extending and enhancing their own performances. In a drama lesson Year 7 students sang Christmas songs very effectively in different dramatic styles as part of their understanding and interpretation of life in Victorian workhouses. At all levels, students are very skilled in their use of expressive gestures, for instance in dance, and expressive language to convey ideas and feelings. They are confident performers, able to improvise and draw ideas from their own experiences and imaginations.

170. The quality of teaching in dance and drama is invariably at least good and often very good. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject area, and lessons are well planned and move with good pace. Students are aware of assessment criteria and are encouraged to evaluate and discuss their work using appropriate language. Dance and drama lessons are well used to explore moral and social issues such as racism. For example, in a Year 10 drama lesson, students explored racism through listening to music about slavery and racism and then worked effectively on developing performances to illustrate what it must have been like to be enslaved. The extra-curricular activities are well organised and give participants good opportunities to rehearse and perform in a variety of venues. This department adds considerable cultural value to students' personal development at Knutsford High School.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

171. Activities in physical education were observed in games and gymnastics for students in Key Stage 3; in games, swimming, physical education theory and sports leadership for students in Key Stage 4; and in games and sports theory for students between in the sixth form.
172. Many students in Key Stage 4 follow the GCSE examination course in physical education. The proportion of students gaining A*-C grades in the 2000 examination was well above the national average for both boys and girls, and was higher than for most other subjects in the school. All students achieved a grade between A*-G in 2000, and this was also better than the national average. Results have also been well above average in the previous two years.
173. The proportion of students gaining the higher A-B grades in the 2000 A-level examination was above the national average, although it was below in the previous two years. All students achieved a pass grade (A-E grades) in 2000, and the pass rate has been consistently good.
174. Standards of attainment in Key Stages 3 and 4 are above the national expectations in the key areas of performance, knowledge and understanding. Standards in the sixth form in physical education theory are in line with the course average nationally. There was insufficient evidence to make a judgement on standards of practical performance of Year 13 students. Standards in practical performance of students following the AS course in Year 12 are above the expectations for this age group for this stage of the course.

175. Students enter the school at the age of eleven with varying standards. By the age of 14 they are proficient in several aspects of games, gymnastics and swimming. In ball games, notably hockey and netball, students have developed several skills well. In netball they learn to pass and receive the ball with increasing accuracy and control, although students' ability to achieve this with consistency and confidence in a game situation, when under pressure, is variable. Similarly, in hockey, students learn the correct stick grips and learn to pass and dribble proficiently with the ball. In swimming, the majority of students by the age of 14 achieve a good standard in swimming up to two hundred metres using a variety of strokes as well as learning some of the various techniques of lifesaving and survival. In gymnastics students achieve a good standard of performance: in pairs or small groups they design a series of controlled movements on and off apparatus, incorporating routines such as assisted flight with due regard to features such as poise and balance. Students also show a good ability to evaluate their performance. Overall, by the age of 14, students of all abilities achieve good standards in relation to their abilities.
176. By the age of 16 students in core physical education lessons learn to perform effective combinations, and sometimes a routine, in trampolining, with increasing poise and control. In basketball they learn to carry out a more consistent lay up shot. Students also develop a sound understanding of the basic rules of games: for example, what constitute the various fouls in hockey and basketball. Their tactical awareness increases, although lower-achievers have a limited capability to appreciate, for example, the possibilities of using space to good effect in ball games. Students following the junior sports leadership award learn to take individual responsibility for developing a teaching programme. Students of all levels of ability achieve well by the age of 16, in relation to their abilities.
177. All students in Key Stages 3 and 4 effectively learn the value of teamwork. Students with special educational needs make good progress in improving performance skills in various games.
178. Standards of students following the GCSE course are above the course average nationally: for example in basketball, where many students achieve a good level of proficiency; and in soccer, where students display a level of ball skills in practices and games well above national expectations. In theory work many students demonstrate a detailed understanding of the rules and techniques of certain sports such as trampolining, badminton and swimming. They also show a good understanding of the functions of different parts of the body such as the muscular system. The quality of some of the written work is reduced by deficiencies in the technical accuracy of writing, for example spelling.
179. Standards in the sixth form are broadly in line with the course average nationally in the theoretical parts of the A-level course. Students show a good level of knowledge and understanding of the physiological and psychological factors which influence sporting achievement, and also of the relationship between sport and society in an historical and contemporary context. Several students following the AS module in Year 12 achieve standards in practical performance which are above the expectations for their age group.
180. The quality of teaching in physical education is good overall. At Key Stage 3, the quality of teaching is always at least good, and it is very good in almost half of the lessons. At Key Stage 4 the teaching is always at least satisfactory, and it is good or very good in five out of six lessons. Only two lessons were observed at post-16 level: one was satisfactory and one was very good.
181. Where teaching is good or very good it is characterised by several features. For example, particularly impressive is the subject knowledge displayed by teachers in several sports. This subject knowledge is conveyed to students clearly, confidently and in a lively fashion, and is important in helping students achieve good standards. This was seen for example when teachers were explaining lifesaving techniques to

students in Year 9, stick handling techniques in hockey to students in Years 8 and 12, and trampolining techniques to students in Year 10. Teachers' explanations are made even more effective by being combined with good demonstrations, either by the teacher or students themselves. Skilful questioning consolidates understanding and ensures that students know exactly what they are required to do. This expertise on the part of teachers gives students confidence and also motivates them to give of their best. The resulting pace of learning is often impressive. Teachers also clearly outline their objectives at the start of almost all lessons, and review progress towards meeting them towards the end, so that students have a clear understanding of what they have achieved.

182. In ball games students also learn well through the way in which teachers introduce progressively more challenging exercises, which reinforce and extend skill levels and sustain student interest. For example, when teaching tackling techniques in hockey, Year 12 students are made to run a 'gauntlet' of defenders, whilst in a game situation hockey players are required to take on an opponent before passing. In a football skills practice Year 11 students are required to use progressively fewer touches when passing to each other under pressure from defenders, thereby increasing their proficiency in using both their stronger and weaker foot. In netball teachers employ a range of strategies to encourage students to utilise space more effectively. Students enjoy the blend of challenging practice and competition in these situations and visibly improve their performance as a result.
183. In most lessons teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve. Teachers intervene appropriately during practices in order to make specific points to reinforce understanding and create opportunities for students to evaluate their progress in lessons as well as to show initiative. For example, students devise their own warm-up routines before hockey and basketball practices, and are expected to identify the muscle groups affected. Students in a Year 8 gymnastics lesson were encouraged to constructively evaluate each other's routines, thereby learning to appreciate the qualities of good performance. Students also show responsibility as in a Year 11 junior sports leadership lesson when the teacher made students 'teach' one another. As a result of good relationships between students and teachers, students are highly motivated, enjoy activities and in consequence usually make good progress in their learning, whatever their level of ability. Students' enjoyment is demonstrated further by the high level of participation in extra-curricular sport, a commitment which raises standards of attainment still further.
184. Although the teaching in all lessons is at least satisfactory, the pace is less brisk and effective in theory lessons on examination courses than in practical sessions. Although teachers' subject knowledge is good, there is a tendency in theory classes to allow students to become too dependent on the teacher instead of being encouraged to find out information for themselves or to formulate their own opinions. Some of the marking of work displays relatively low expectations of what students can achieve, for example in the technical accuracy of their writing.
185. Leadership and management within the physical education department are very good. Although the formal monitoring of teaching is relatively undeveloped, the head of department and other members have put together extensive and useful schemes of work and an extensive system of assessment, both of which have contributed to the high expectations which teachers have of their students. Teachers also show their commitment by the wide range of extra-curricular activities, including outdoor pursuits, run for students. These include regular clubs and training sessions for several sports and more ambitious projects such as the soccer link with the United States. The school's sports' teams have a good record of success, and several individuals have represented the school at all levels up to national level. The broad range of activities offered within the school to some extent compensates for the relatively low time allocation to core physical education in Key Stage 4, and all 16-year-olds have the opportunity for accreditation, which increases motivation. Parents

and staff in the school rightly value the major contribution which the faculty makes to the school and the community. The high quality of accommodation, in particular the sports hall, the swimming pool and the Astroturf all-weather pitch, also contributes to high standards.

186. The previous inspection judged that standards in physical education were good, particularly at Key Stages 3 and 4, and that the quality of teaching and learning was generally good. This is still the case. There is now more self-evaluation by students, and the use of assessment has been developed since 1996. Therefore the physical education department has made good progress since the previous inspection.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

187. Standards of attainment in religious education are above national expectations. Students arrive from a very wide catchment area with a vast difference in their understanding of religious concepts. Most students make good progress and by the end of Key Stage 3 they have a good framework of knowledge which helps them understand the role that religion plays in life.
188. By the end of Key Stage 3, students have a good understanding of the main beliefs and practices of Christianity and the other main religions that are found in our society. They are able to explain how many of these beliefs are shared by different religions and also to show how they make an impact on the lives of individuals. A Year 8 group fully understood the importance of the fast of Ramadan in the life of a Muslim. Students have a good working knowledge of religious language and symbolism. A Year 7 class showed a good knowledge of the Christian teaching on the incarnation.
189. The progress of students with special educational needs is very good. In a Year 8 class a group of students prepared a small play which demonstrated a very good understanding of the Muslim moon and crescent symbol. However the progress of the higher attainers is only satisfactory. Examination of samples of students' work shows that the able students within the sample did not develop the subject sufficiently, for example, when completing a project on Martin Luther King the more able students.
190. All students respond well to religious perspectives and can relate these to their own lives. Their ability to sensitively empathise with the life style and beliefs of others is good. At all times they display a very positive and mature attitude to religious issues.
191. At Key Stage 4 a number of students take the religious studies examination course. The range of ability in the classes varies considerably. Close analysis of these results reveals that in terms of value added they are good. Current work seen indicates that students are developing a good knowledge base and also the necessary skills to do well in examinations. A Year 10 group had a good understanding of the theory of the 'just war'. Students of all abilities are making good progress.
192. For the rest of the students in this stage the sound foundation that is laid at Key Stage 3 is not built upon. Although there are units of work in the current personal, social and health education programme that contain elements of religious material neither the time nor the content are sufficient to meet either legal requirements or the syllabus laid down by the local authority. Students do have a strong awareness of contemporary moral and social issues. They discuss with sensitivity and empathy topics that contain religious elements but their knowledge and understanding of religious language and concepts is not taken forward. As a result standards of religious knowledge at Key Stage 4 for students not following a GCSE course are below expectations and students are underachieving.
193. In the sixth form, a small group of students take the religious studies A-level. It is not possible to compare examination results with national figures because the group is so small. Internal analysis reveals that students make good progress and achieve grades that are in line with expectations.
194. The current groups have a very good knowledge and understanding of the complex

theological and philosophical concepts that are covered. They are making very good progress. There is no provision for religious education for the rest of the sixth form.

195. The overall quality of teaching is good, with over 40 per cent of the lessons seen being very good. Teachers have a good subject knowledge, which is well used to raise attainment. Well planned lessons, using a variety of teaching methods, interest and motivate students. In a Year 9 lesson the teacher used a carefully prepared role play exercise to involve students in a lesson on prejudice. Modern resources are effectively used to illustrate the subject. At all times relationships are positive and encouraging. Students respond with interest entering into discussions in a lively and enthusiastic manner. Students are given opportunities to reflect upon religious perspectives. In a Year 10 lesson students were keenly involved in an exercise illustrating the value of quiet reflection and meditation. Written work is well marked with formative comments. Suitable assessment tasks are set and the results fed back to students in a constructive manner. A Year 9 group spent some time considering how they could improve upon the assessment project they had just completed. Well-decorated rooms create a good learning environment but the problems of a split site, coupled with the fact that there is only one religious education room, means that teachers occasionally arrive late to lessons.
196. In the small minority of weaker lessons, the more able students are not sufficiently challenged. In a Year 7 lesson very able students quickly finished tasks on the Christmas story and did not begin to evaluate the type of literature that you can find in the Bible. Although the department is beginning to use information and communication technology this is an underdeveloped area.
197. The subject is well managed and since the last inspection there has been good progress in some areas. However the failure of the school to thoroughly address the lack of religious education in Key Stage 4 and Post-16 area detracts from this progress. Because of this the overall progress since the last inspection is satisfactory.