

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **LONGFIELD SCHOOL**

Darlington

LEA area: Darlington

Unique reference number: 114322

Headteacher: Mr M R Parr

Reporting inspector: Mr T Wrigley  
(OFSTED No: 12482)

Dates of inspection: 27 November - 1 December 2000

Inspection number: 223751

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-16
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Longfield Road Darlington
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr D Watson
Date of previous inspection:	27.11.95

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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Terry Wrigley (OFSTED No: 12482)	Registered inspector	Spanish	What sort of school is it?
		Equal opportunities	The school's results and achievements
			How well are pupils or students taught?
			How well is the school led and managed?
Malcolm Weaver (OFSTED No: 9352)	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
			How well does the school care for its pupils?
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Peter Austin (OFSTED No: 19866)	Team inspector	Art	
Kenneth Boden (OFSTED No: 30899)	Team inspector	Design and technology	
Ronald Bulman (OFSTED No: 15396)	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
Sylvia Greenland (OFSTED No: 23324)	Team inspector	History	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils or students?
Peter Hick (OFSTED No: 10739)	Team inspector	Physical education	
Ken Hounslow (OFSTED No: 27585)	Team inspector	Science	
Thomas Howard (OFSTED No: 27416)	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Jack Mallinson (OFSTED No: 12121)	Team inspector	English	Spiritual moral social and cultural
Patricia Mitchell (OFSTED No: 15551)	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
Frederick Peacock	Team inspector	Music	

(OFSTED No: 8360)			
Clive Potter (OFSTED No: 4703)	Team inspector	Information technology	
David White (OFSTED No: 30918)	Team inspector	Religious education	
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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Longfield School is a comprehensive school for pupils between the ages of 11 and 16. It is of average size, with 938 pupils. There are approximately equal numbers of boys and girls. There is a small number of pupils from minority ethnic groups, some of whom speak English as an additional language. Attainment on entry is roughly average, although about a third of pupils entering the school have serious difficulties in literacy. About a fifth of the pupils have special educational needs, which is average, and ten pupils have statements of special needs. Around 18 per cent of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is slightly above average, and there is not a strong tradition of people proceeding to higher education courses in the school's immediate area.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

This is a good school, where staff care for pupils and work hard to ensure their success. Standards at age 14 are in line with the national average. GCSE results in 2000 were still below national average levels, but the pupils concerned made good progress compared with their achievement at age 14. Teaching is overwhelmingly good, the school is well led, and the school provides good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- Standards have significantly improved. They are now around the national average at age 14, and moving towards national levels at age 16.
- Standards are above the national average in art, design and technology, languages and physical education throughout the school, and in mathematics at Key Stage 3.
- Teaching is good and often very good at both key stages, and pupils learn well.
- Pupils' attitudes are very positive, their behaviour is good and their relationships with each other and with staff are very good.
- A broad and balanced curriculum is provided, including an increasing emphasis on literacy and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) for learning.
- There is a high level of involvement in extra-curricular activities.
- The Learning Resource Base provides very good support for individual learning, through books and ICT.
- The school is well managed, with clear, thoughtful and decisive leadership.

The school's strengths far outweigh its weaknesses.

#### **What could be improved**

- There is potential for further improvement in standards overall, and in some subjects.
- Teachers need to create more opportunities for pupils to think for themselves, including problem solving and discussion.
- The analysis of pupils with special educational needs is imprecise, and the needs of children with serious difficulties in reading are not being sufficiently met.
- Better information should be provided to parents on their children's achievement and progress.
- The funding allocated to the school is low, which increases the size of classes, limits specialist teaching for children with learning difficulties, and slows down improvements in education.
- Despite some recent improvements, the accommodation is inadequate and some buildings are of poor quality.

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

In addition, the governors should consider the following weaknesses.

- There is no strategy to improve numeracy across the curriculum.
- There are some areas of weakness in cultural development, particularly drama and music.
- The school has not yet developed a strategy to provide for very able and talented pupils.

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Teaching has significantly improved, leading to greater achievement which is moving results towards the national average. The school is achieving its targets for improvement in results at ages 14 and 16. The achievements of boys and girls have both improved; though there is still a significant gap, it is no greater than nationally. Lesson planning is more systematic, and writing has improved due to a whole-school literacy strategy. Many new computers have been bought, and are being well used for individual learning. Good standards of behaviour and a caring ethos have been sustained, and pupils are being encouraged to participate more actively in developing their school. Some improvements have been made in how pupils are grouped into classes, but further change is desirable, so that pupils are no longer placed in a lower set for some subjects because of weaknesses in others. Planning and provision for pupils with special educational needs has improved, including establishing a register and setting up home-school reading partnerships, but is still not adequate. Better use is made of assessment data, but reports to parents are too vague. The spiritual aspect of education has been improved, largely through religious education, which is now provided to all pupils. The new headteacher has a clear vision for the future of the school, and encourages staff and pupils to contribute ideas for further improvement.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14 and 16-year-olds based on average point scores in Key Stage 3 tests and in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	All schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	E	C	C	C	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
Key Stage 3 tests	D	C	C	B	

GCSE results are close to the national average, although the percentage of pupils achieving five or more A\*-C grades is below average. Standards are particularly good in art, child development, design and technology, languages and physical education. Very few pupils leave school without success in some GCSE examinations. Standards at age 14 are also around the national average, with good results in English and mathematics. Examination and test results are improving faster than in other schools, and standards are relatively high when compared with schools in similar areas. The school achieved its agreed targets for GCSE success.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Most pupils show very positive attitudes to learning and to their school. They are well motivated, receptive and willing to respond and participate when challenge is provided. They work hard in the majority of lessons and persevere well with tasks, whether individual or in pairs and groups.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is good overall, both in lessons and around the school. Disruption of lessons is rare and quickly dealt with. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their own behaviour.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between pupils and with staff are harmonious and respectful. Initiative and responsibility are encouraged. Pupils respond willingly and are keen to take responsibility where opportunities are provided.
Attendance	Levels of attendance are satisfactory.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING



<b>Teaching of pupils:</b>	<b>aged 11-14 years</b>	<b>aged 14-16 years</b>
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good

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

Teaching was good in nearly half the lessons observed. It was very good in a further quarter, and in several lessons was excellent. In a few lessons (about seven per cent) it was unsatisfactory. Teaching is good in mathematics and often in English and science, although the quality varies. Consistently good teaching was observed in art, business studies, design and technology, ICT, languages and physical education.

Lessons are well planned and pupils make good progress, although there are too few opportunities for pupils to think independently or to solve problems collectively. An increasing use is being made of ICT to enhance learning, though not yet in all subjects. There is an effective strategy to improve writing, but there is still insufficient teaching for pupils arriving at the school with poor reading skills. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in many lessons, but reading remains a problem for many. The progress of more able pupils is satisfactory so that the school is now achieving an appropriate number of A and A\* grades, but the needs of particularly able and talented pupils are not being fully met.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad and balanced, and includes some vocational opportunities for older pupils. The division of pupils into teaching groups at Key Stage 3 is still not satisfactory, since achievement in a few subjects affects grouping in the rest. A numeracy strategy needs to be developed. Extra-curricular provision is good. There is a good programme for personal development, including careers and health education. Many departments have established strong links with the primary schools.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Individual needs are not identified precisely enough, and programmes and targets for improvement are often too vague. Children entering the school with serious weaknesses in reading benefit from the home-school reading partnership. However, they do not receive sufficient specialist teaching, so that progress in reading is often inadequate. Their writing benefits from the whole-school literacy strategy.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Effective support is provided for this small group of pupils. Specialist teaching is provided, and help of various kinds, including communicating with parents.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Pupils' all-round development is well supported. Pupils are increasingly encouraged to show initiative and involved in discussions to improve their lives at school. Pupils' moral and social development is strong within the school, but an understanding of wider social issues should be enhanced. Provision for cultural development is uneven, with strengths in art but weaknesses in drama and music.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school provides a very caring and supportive environment in which good provision is made for the welfare and guidance of the pupils. Monitoring of pupils' academic progress is good.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	There is clear-sighted leadership from the headteacher and other key staff, and a determination at all levels to continue improving the school. The strong focus on improving teaching has been effective and should be further developed. Decisive action has been taken on some problem issues. Many subjects and aspects of the school are well led and managed.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are committed to the school. They have a good understanding and are closely involved in discussing policies and development. They are actively pressing for improved finance and ensuring that it is well used.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school has begun to analyse assessment information, and development planning is thoughtful and systematic.
The strategic use of resources	Good use is made of a limited budget, and opportunities for improvement in resources are actively sought, including accommodation. Staffing and learning resources are just adequate overall, but the accommodation needs upgrading. Many new computers have been bought, and the Learning Resource Base is well managed and fully used.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their children are expected to work hard</li> <li>• Children make good progress</li> <li>• They feel comfortable in approaching the school</li> <li>• The school helps their children develop maturity and responsibility</li> <li>• The teaching is good</li> <li>• The school is well led and managed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearer information about their child's progress</li> <li>• Information and the opportunity to consult staff earlier in Years 7 and 8, so that they could help their children more</li> <li>• Better timing and evenness in setting homework</li> </ul>

The inspection team is largely in agreement with the parents' views. The links with parents appear to be generally effective, and there is a very good newsletter, but records of pupils' achievement do not identify what pupils have learned or provide specific targets for improvement. The school seeks to encourage parents to support their children's work at home through homework diaries, but, in the absence of a homework timetable, more frequent monitoring is needed of the quantity and regularity of homework for all pupils.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and achievements**

1. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is around the national average, according to the results of National Curriculum tests carried out in the primary schools at the end of Key Stage 2. However, a substantial number of children now enter Longfield School with serious deficiencies in reading. The tests carried out early in Year 7 show that about a quarter of pupils have reading ages which are two years behind their actual age.
2. Standards overall are broadly in line with national standards at age 14, and close to the national average at age 16. Considering the relevant factors, achievement is satisfactory at both key stages. When compared with similar schools (measured by the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals) achievement is good at age 14 and in line with other schools at age 16. Comparisons between test and examination results show that pupils are making satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3. The standards of pupils who sat the GCSE examinations this year were higher than could be expected from their test results when they were 14, though progress in English and science was less than could be expected from the same pupils' Key Stage 3 results in those same subjects. Given the way in which the school has improved recently, it appears likely that this group of pupils may have made inadequate progress in their early years at the school, but have made good progress since. Inspectors' observations confirm that in general pupils are now making good progress in most subjects.
3. Standards in the core subjects at age 14 are above the national averages in English and mathematics but below average in science. In the 2000 National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3, the proportion of pupils achieving level 5 and higher in English was above the national average, as was the proportion achieving level 6 and higher. In mathematics, the proportion achieving level 5 was average but an above average proportion of pupils achieved level 6 or higher. In science, the test results were below the national average, though the proportion of pupils reaching Level 5 and those reaching Level 6 was quite close to that in other schools. Overall, results at age 14 have been significantly better in 1999 and 2000 than previously. A particular improvement was made in English this year, and in mathematics in terms of the number of pupils reaching level 6. A substantial improvement was made in science in 1999 compared with 1998, but the gap widened again between school and national results in 2000.
4. When compared with similar schools, the results in English and mathematics were well above expectations, and in science were in line with them. The results across all core subjects were also significantly higher than in similar schools.
5. In most other subjects at the end of Key Stage 3, standards meet or exceed the national expectation. A good standard is achieved in art, design and technology, foreign languages and physical education. Standards are satisfactory in history, information and communication technology (ICT), music and religious education but below in geography. Pupils are currently making good progress in art, design and technology, history, information technology and foreign languages, and satisfactory progress in geography, music and religious education. A study of how to improve writing across the school is helping to bring about overall improvement, and the recent purchase of more computers and their availability is leading to greater confidence in using information and communication technology (ICT) for learning.
6. GCSE results in 1999 and 2000 show a significant improvement when compared with the previous two years, though they are still below the national average. In 2000, the number of pupils gaining GCSE certificates in five or more subjects at grades A\*-G was close to the national average, and the number gaining at least one certificate is in line with national expectations. The number of pupils achieving five or more A\*-C grades is below average, as are the average grades per pupil. In the core subjects, there has been an increase in the percentage of pupils achieving A\*-C grades in recent years, but the development is uneven and there is still a gap between school and national figures. There was a strong improvement in mathematics and science in 1999 and 2000 compared with 1998, and in mathematics the proportion of pupils achieving A\*-C grades is quite

close to the national average. There is still a substantial gap between the school and the national average in English and science.

7. A major improvement in results was achieved in foreign languages in 1999, with a further improvement in 2000. Results in 2000 were significantly higher than in 1998 in art, business studies, history and childcare. The proportion of the total number of pupils in the year group who achieved A\*-C grades in any foreign language or design and technology subject was above the national average. Of those entered for an optional subject, the school results were significantly higher than the national average in childcare and physical education. Recent results have been broadly in line with national expectations in art, business studies, history and religious education. Results in 2000 in geography and information technology were well below national results, and the school has taken decisive action to bring about an improvement.
8. When comparing the proportion of pupils gaining A\*-C grades with that in similar schools, results for English and mathematics were above expectations and for science they were in line with them. Of the core subjects, mathematics showed a particularly strong improvement when compared with the same pupils' results at age 14.
9. Pupils with special educational needs make reasonable progress in many lessons, given their difficulties. However, pupils who enter secondary school with serious difficulties in reading need to make particular progress. This is at present unsatisfactory. There has been an improvement since the last inspection and for the past two years all pupils with a statement of special need have gained at least one GCSE grade. Lower attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in many lessons, especially when work is adapted and matched to their needs. This is done well in mathematics, French and religious education. Where this does not happen, they do not learn as much as they could as they are restricted by limited literacy skills. Pupils can make good progress in lessons where they receive help from support assistants, but often this help is not available. Individual needs are not identified precisely enough, either general or particular subjects, and targets for improvement in their individual programmes are not detailed enough to be helpful to teachers planning special work. Targets are often stated in very general terms, such as 'to improve standards of classwork' or 'improve literacy skills'. Nearly a third of pupils enter the school with limited reading skills and there is no specialist programme of teaching reading to help them to improve significantly during their first year, which is limiting the progress they make. Many pupils do, however, benefit from a successful initiative in establishing a home-school reading partnership. The whole-school literacy strategy has focused on giving greater guidance in writing, and this is already proving effective.
10. There has been a significant increase in the proportion of A and A\* grades achieved, with notable success in science this year. Most able pupils are making satisfactory progress and achieving good grades, but there is potential to serve their needs better. Some new pupils took part this year in a successful summer school for able and talented pupils. An increasing use of independent learning, a greater challenge to think for themselves and an engagement in small-group discussion, for example to solve problems or debate issues, will benefit the most able pupils and many others. Many schools are now developing strategies for particularly able and talented pupils, and this is also being considered at Longfield.
11. Boys' attainment is generally below that of girls, as is true nationally. The difference, and the comparison with national differences, varies according to which statistical measure is being used, but appears no greater than the national difference. In Key Stage 3 tests, boys did better than boys nationally in reaching Level 5 and girls less well than girls in other schools in English, mathematics and science. In the GCSE, the distance between boys and girls was on average greater than nationally, and the achievement of girls in recent years has risen faster than that of boys in comparison with national averages.
12. The school has a small proportion of bilingual pupils, mainly from families originating in Bangladesh and India. Their needs are being well catered for, but, on the basis of only two or three pupils per school year, data are insufficient to be able to make an overall assessment of their progress. The school should continue to monitor the progress of individual pupils.

13. Statistics available for the years from the mid-1990s to 2000 show an improvement both in National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 and in GCSE results which has been faster than the national average, and the school is achieving its targets for improvement.
14. The literacy programme initiated in the last three years has many strengths, and is bearing fruit. A major aim has been to achieve consistency across the school by monitoring samples of written work, giving guidance on presentation, regular reference to dictionaries, a common approach to spelling (with the display of key words), and a pack of practical ideas for use in the classroom. Each year progress is reviewed. So far the programme has concentrated on writing and comprehension. As a result, pupils can generally understand their books and worksheets, and are confident in the use of the subject's technical vocabulary. It was observed that all departments have made some progress in the implementation of the policy, examples being the use of dictionaries in information technology, technical terms in mathematics, correction of spelling in science, the display of "word-walls" in modern languages and clear sentence construction in history. The widespread use of writing-frames has helped pupils to structure extended writing according to the conventions of the subject and genre. This has helped pupils improve their writing in many subjects. Despite this wide-ranging commitment, standards of literacy are still below national expectation. Further development is needed to include speaking, listening and reading. Greater emphasis on these skills can only improve standards of writing too. For example, more opportunities for discussion in small groups and the whole class will help pupils practise the language of academic argument and develop ideas.
15. There is no whole-school numeracy policy but the general level of numeracy within the school is satisfactory to support learning across the curriculum. National developments in the National Numeracy Initiative are being keenly watched and lessons drawn. New strategies for improving numeracy are evident throughout all mathematics lessons. The ICT and design and technology departments contribute to the numeracy development of pupils. During ICT lessons pupils develop calculating skills, the use of formulae when using spreadsheets and use a variety of software to develop understanding of two-dimensional shapes. In design subjects, they use their measuring and drawing skills in manufacturing and design projects. In food and textiles lessons, they make good use of weighing and estimations and often analyse the differences in quantities between recipes and the subsequent effects on the final products. Modern foreign language subjects use pupils' number skills when they talk or write about dates, time, counting and money in the foreign language. However, other subjects make little contribution to the development of mathematical skills of pupils. There are missed opportunities in history and geography to develop pupils' graph work, when analysing data and presenting them in graphical form. Graphs produced are often under-developed or incomplete. In science lessons, teachers make few demands on pupils to improve numeracy skills. There is a need for the school to develop a numeracy policy to increase learning opportunities across the curriculum and promote accurate use of skills in all subject areas.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development**

16. The pupils' attitudes to school are very good. They are well motivated, receptive and willing to participate and respond to challenge when presented with it. These attitudes are a good feature of the school. The aims of the school include the provision of opportunities to enable all pupils to experience success and to develop their confidence, pride and talents in preparation for their future. These aims are generally being met well. Pupils work hard in the majority of subjects and persevere with tasks set, both individually and when working in pairs with other pupils. They show an ability to work independently and collaboratively but this potential is not fully tapped in all subjects, owing to the restricted styles of teaching in some lessons.
17. In the last inspection, the pupils' behaviour was seen as good. This has been maintained and results in pupils' sustaining a positive response to the work set. They behave well in the majority of lessons and around the school. Pupils show good self-control and consideration for one another, particularly in the playground during the morning and lunch breaks, despite the bare and uninviting nature of the playground. Particularly good standards of self-control and self-restraint are required in the narrow, congested corridors and stairways. Pupils handle such situations well, with patience and good humour. There is an absence of graffiti around the school and in pupils' exercise books. There is clear respect for people and property, especially in practical subjects, where equipment is treated responsibly.

18. There were two permanent and 28 temporary exclusions last year, mostly of boys. The number of exclusions is lower than that reported in the last inspection and is below the national average for schools of this size. In cases where pupils' behaviour becomes unacceptable there are clearly defined procedures for staff to follow.
19. The school has an effective anti-bullying policy and pupils commented on how effective they consider it to be for issues to be raised and dealt with. It is closely linked to openness between pupils and staff. The behaviour reward scheme in the school, aptly named PRIDE, promotes good standards of personal behaviour and is enthusiastically appreciated by the pupils. They take responsibility well for their own self-discipline. The school has responded well to a key issue from the last inspection, that it should continue to address unacceptable behaviour.
20. Pupils show respect for one another and for adults. They move around the school without problems being created and their satisfactory orderliness and levels of courtesy are reinforced by teachers in and around the school. There are very good and constructive relationships between pupils and teaching and non-teaching staff, and among the pupils themselves who consistently show respect for the feelings, values and opinions of others. There is good racial harmony and pupils from different ethnic backgrounds appear to be well integrated into the work and life of the school. Staff know the pupils well and treat them with courtesy and friendliness to which the pupils respond well in return. The level of attendance has risen since the last inspection and is broadly in line with the national average. This is as a result of the very effective arrangements for contacting parents in the event of pupils' absence, which helps to sustain the pressure on pupils to maintain regular attendance.
21. Standards of personal development are good and are only limited by a lack of opportunities in some lessons for pupils to develop personal research or to take more responsibility for their own learning. Most pupils take advantage of the opportunities to offer suggestions for a wide variety of initiatives through the very effective school-wide council system. Pupils have been involved in generating plans for a covered social area in the yard, but unfortunately the expected funding has not yet materialised. As a result of the opportunities for initiating action, older pupils have visited primary schools to mentor primary pupils in helping them to begin school councils in their own schools. Year 11 pupils also offer support to younger pupils in promoting anti-smoking and a healthy lifestyle. Each form has its own representatives who meet as a whole council to discuss and agree issues for improvement raised by the pupils themselves, such as obtaining green bins for recycling rubbish, obtaining a speaker system for whole-school presentations and identifying and supporting a wide range of charities. One achievement by pupils on the school council has been to obtain substantial discounts from a large number of shops in Darlington town for older pupils in the school. This is seen as a further positive inducement for pupils to sustain good behaviour and to develop positive links with the wider community. The school also has an effective system of prefects, who approach their duties in a mature and responsible manner.
22. There has been an improvement since the last inspection in the conduct of pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties, who tended to disrupt lessons in the lower ability band classes, preventing pupils from working properly. This has been dealt with successfully by the school and pupils with behavioural difficulties are well managed, generally behave well, and work hard. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated into the classes and are able to work collaboratively with other pupils.

## **HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

23. The quality of teaching throughout the school is a major cause of the improving standards. The teachers are committed and hardworking, they reflect on the methods they use, and are intent upon all their pupils making progress.
24. Teaching is good at both key stages. During the inspection, it was at least satisfactory in the overwhelming majority of lessons observed. In about half it was good, and in a further quarter was very good. Several excellent lessons were seen. In only seven per cent of lessons was it unsatisfactory. This is a very high proportion of good teaching.

25. Teaching is good in many subjects, and satisfactory in the others. It is normally good in mathematics and often in English and science, although the quality does vary. Consistently good teaching was observed in art, business studies, design and technology, information technology, languages and physical education.
26. The teachers show a strong understanding of the content and teaching methods of their subjects. The planning of lessons is effective in terms of the selection and sequencing of activities, as well as the general match of activities to the age and ability of the classes. In the best cases, lessons are planned to achieve realistic progression and challenge. Teachers often clarify the aims of the lesson. Teachers have positive expectations of pupils and they are determined for them to gain good examination successes. In some cases, the positive attitudes need to be converted into practices which will raise achievement, for example by providing frequent opportunities to generate hypotheses and reach theoretical conclusions in science.
27. Teaching methods are very effective in some subjects, but in others there are aspects which could be improved. Explanations are generally clear, and often good use is made of visual images, but in some subjects pupils would learn better if more direct experience were available, for example through more fieldwork. In the best lessons, teachers provide opportunities for pupils to think for themselves and contribute their ideas. They organise activities which require group discussions to solve problems and debate issues. In some lessons, teachers, from anxiety to cover all the material of the course, concentrate on transmitting knowledge and do not facilitate deeper thinking or the learning of key concepts. In these lessons, learning is excessively tied to remembering the content of the textbook, proceeding through exercises and copying from the board rather than by using these activities in combination with other techniques to develop a deeper understanding, empathy and critical awareness. In the best lessons, in history or religious education, for example, teaching approaches develop a fruitful combination of cognitive and affective development linked to a thorough factual basis.
28. Teachers' management of pupils is good throughout the school. Disruption to learning is rare and is quickly dealt with, if necessary through the intervention of staff who are on call to deal with disruptive incidents. An orderly atmosphere is established and supported through strong and positive relationships with pupils. Pupils settle readily to new tasks. Teachers' attitudes towards pupils, both in lessons and in the whole life of the school, contribute well to their learning and progress.
29. Lessons are generally conducted at a good pace, and time is well used. Resources for learning are only just adequate: books are barely sufficient in some subjects, which can affect opportunities for homework. The number of computers has recently been increased substantially, though they are not available in all subject areas. The Learning Resource Base provides a well managed and welcoming access to books, other print resources and multimedia ICT resources through CD-Roms and the Internet. This still needs developing, including increasing the stock of books to meet curricular needs. Many pupils take advantage of the Learning Resource Base in lessons, at lunchtimes and after school. Teachers often adapt worksheets to meet the different needs of pupils in their classes. Overhead projectors are well used where they are available.
30. Pupils' work is often conscientiously marked, with encouragement for pupils to improve. However, in some subjects, marking is less satisfactory, with insufficient evaluation and advice. There are variations in the extent to which marking is used to improve literacy skills. Teachers often make good use of informal feedback and are sensitive to pupils' levels of understanding during classroom discussion and questioning. National Curriculum levels are well used in some subjects as an aid to monitoring individual progress.
31. Homework is often well used, although some groups receive less than they should, and some older pupils receive so much all at once that it is difficult to manage.
32. The school is actively trying to improve the development of basic skills. A literacy strategy is being actively developed, and good progress has been made in improving writing through writing frames, although in some subjects pupils do not progress to a better understanding of genres and to writing more independently. Limited opportunities to learn actively in small groups may be a factor in many pupils' lack of confidence in speaking, and in some lessons teachers do almost all of the talking. The literacy strategy for reading now needs to be built, and attention needs to be

paid to the intensive improvement of basic reading skills for some pupils, as well as flexible and critical approaches in reading for learning. This will become increasingly important as independent learning increases, partly owing to increased use of ICT. There is as yet no whole-school strategy to develop numeracy and even departments such as science and geography do not do enough to encourage the application of mathematical knowledge to realistic problems. However, staff are studying the National Numeracy Initiative and learning from this. ICT skills are well taught and are increasingly being used in some subjects to enhance learning. Good opportunities for independent learning through ICT are provided at the Learning Resource Base.

33. Specially adapted work for pupils with learning difficulties is provided in some classes, especially in mathematics, religious education and French and this helps them to learn. However in some classes, especially the mixed ability classes in Year 7, the work is not well matched to the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and they are not able to complete it satisfactorily. Support assistants make a valuable contribution to the progress made by pupils with special educational needs, including those pupils with behavioural difficulties. They provide firm yet caring guidance and help them to concentrate on their work and achieve some success. However, not enough support is provided, especially for mixed ability classes, science and English lessons. The last inspection reported that the individual programmes written for pupils with special educational needs were not detailed enough to give sufficient guidance to teachers. This still applies. All departments now have the responsibility of setting a target for improvement for each pupil with special educational needs. These are often imprecise; for example, there are targets such as 'to give opportunities to read' or 'to improve the amount of work achieved'. Targets often remain unchanged for a long time, and without a record of the progress made to meet them. This is limiting the learning of these pupils.
34. The teaching of more able pupils is satisfactory, and has already led to an increase in the proportion of A and A\* grades at GCSE, with particular success this year in science and foreign languages. In mathematics at Key Stage 3, challenging teaching has resulted in an above average number of pupils reaching Level 6 and above.
35. The quality of teaching, relationships and pupils' attitudes is leading to learning which is good at both key stages. Most pupils make a good effort, although further steps could be taken to develop critical thinking and originality in many subjects. They work efficiently and at a good pace, and show concentration and interest in lessons. In some lessons, pupils are aware of their achievement and of ways in which they can improve.
36. Teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection. This has been a particular concern of school development in the last two years; a well-planned process of monitoring by observing lessons has taken place. During the last inspection, only seven out of ten lessons at Key Stage 3 were considered to be 'sound or better'. Now, few lessons are unsatisfactory. Inspectors commented that pupils were exposed to uninspiring worksheets, and during a further visit by HMI, concerns were expressed about too much copying and too many undemanding tasks. Few examples of uninteresting work were noted during the present inspection. However, there is still a need to deepen the learning of pupils, for example through more opportunities for pupils to develop and express their own ideas, work collaboratively to solve problems and debate issues, and engage in independent research. It is important for the school to continue to focus on teaching, through monitoring at both school and departmental levels, and through staff development processes designed to share and extend the best practice.

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

### **Curriculum**

37. The quality and range of learning opportunities are satisfactory. The curriculum is taught in a two-week cycle of 50 one-hour periods and it meets all the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum. In Key Stage 3, provision is satisfactory, providing the full range of National Curriculum subjects to all pupils, plus a personal development programme which includes health and careers education. Spanish has been strongly developed as an alternative to French as the



main foreign language, and nearly half the pupils begin German as a second foreign language in Year 8.

38. There have been substantial developments in the use of ICT across the school, including its use in the Learning Resource Base (the library and resource centre) and several specialist areas. In view of the higher expectations of the latest version of the National Curriculum, the school now needs to develop its use in all subjects of the curriculum, especially geography, history, foreign languages, mathematics, music and religious education, which have still to incorporate it into their schemes of work as part of the teaching and learning process.
39. There is also a weakness in the way pupils are allocated into teaching groups in Year 8 and Year 9. The present system of setting within two equal bands is an improvement on the streaming which was criticised in the last report. It has reduced the occurrence of classes of problem pupils, and changed the perceptions of teachers and pupils about the status of pupils in sets for low attainers. The school's policy is to avoid pupils being placed in lower classes because of behaviour rather than aptitude. However, though the new system is more flexible, problems remain. In Year 8, pupils are placed in the same sets for English, art, history, ICT, languages, personal development and religious education. This is strongly influenced by the decision as to whether pupils will study a second foreign language or not. In Year 9 the grouping of pupils in music is decided by their attainment in science and maths. Both situations can lead to pupils being placed in the wrong groups for some subjects, which can affect their progress, and this is not satisfactory. The present system can too easily lead to pupils perceiving themselves as lacking ability overall. There is a need to re-evaluate this arrangement, including considering the appropriateness of ability grouping for some subjects.
40. The curriculum for Key Stage 4 is good. In Year 10 pupils can study from among 20 GCSE subjects and GNVQs in Health and Social Care and ICT, arranged in a common core with three option choice subjects. All pupils follow a half-GCSE course in religious education, and courses in physical education and personal development. In Year 11 there is also a certificate course in ICT and 40 pupils attend vocational courses at Darlington College of Technology after normal school hours. A 'Higher Horizons' course provides the opportunity for pupils who have been poor attenders to study the full range of National Curriculum courses at an off-site centre, so that they are not denied access to education.
41. Many of the weaknesses noted in the last inspection report have been rectified. For example, the time allocated to religious education in Key Stage 4 now meets the requirements of the agreed syllabus; many pupils are seriously engaged in study and are entered for the half-value GCSE. There is an emphasis on homework as part of the programme of study in most subjects but the lack of a homework timetable leads to an uneven workload for pupils who need guidance in how to organise their work. In the absence of a homework timetable, the school needs to be more rigorous in monitoring the homework pupils are given.
42. The provision for pupils with special educational needs has improved but is still unsatisfactory. The school's response to the needs of pupils entering the school with poor reading skills is inadequate. Home-school reading partnerships have been established, and pupils receive some valued help from classroom assistants, but there is no intensive teaching programme during Year 7 to help these pupils catch up. Provision specified in statements for pupils with particularly serious problems is not being fully implemented, especially for pupils with learning difficulties. The statements give detail about what should be provided, including in some cases specialist teaching and programmes to develop literacy and numeracy skills. These are not always provided, and this is limiting the achievements of the pupils. However, pupils with statements of special needs generally gain GCSE certificates in some subjects. The Learning Resource Base provides valuable help and support to all pupils, including at lunchtimes and after school; support assistants are on hand to provide any help required and pupils who attend make good progress. However, attendance is voluntary and not all pupils with special educational needs use this facility. Pupils with special educational needs are fully integrated into the school and study the full National Curriculum.
43. The small number of pupils whose families speak languages other than English are well supported by a visiting specialist. Despite having only a small amount of time each week in the school, her work includes a thorough assessment of new pupils, in-class support, and staff training. She has

worked closely, with English teachers in particular, to develop procedures and resources which will help bilingual pupils to achieve.

44. The school has undertaken a strong development of ways of improving literacy through different subjects. There is a school literacy policy and many departments have made it a priority to raise the quality of literacy teaching through their subject work. This has focused particularly on writing, and it is intended to concentrate now on developing reading skills. Flexible ways of reading for information, including critical reading, are increasingly important as ICT develops. A coherent policy for developing numeracy across various subjects has yet to be developed.
45. The school has begun to take initiatives in catering for more able and talented pupils. A number of new pupils took part in an inter-school summer school with a theme of 'construction'. The proportion of A and A\* grades gained in GCSE examinations has risen, and particular talents are fostered, for example in art and physical education. Provision is not unsatisfactory, but would be improved by the identification of particular talents and abilities and a school strategy which builds on good practice elsewhere. Greater opportunities for independent thinking, independent research and collaborative discussion and problem solving would particularly benefit these pupils.
46. The Learning Resource Base has greatly enhanced learning opportunities. This is a well-managed, attractively decorated and welcoming facility which is well used during lessons, at lunchtimes and after school. Old and unattractive books have been removed from the library, and replaced by modern and often well-illustrated texts. There is a good reference collection, and the fiction and information books for borrowing, while needing further purchases, provide strong encouragement for independent reading. There are also specialist collections of articles for religious education and health education. The careers library is also housed here. The suite of networked computers gives access to a good range of software for research and information processing. It is very well used, and pupils receive expert guidance.
47. Provision for extra-curricular activities is good. It is particularly good for sports, with a number of activities on offer every lunchtime and afternoon, and the opportunity for pupils to take part in inter-school competitions. Many clubs and study groups meet during lunchtimes and after school, for example French, design and technology, and English. The modern languages department offers a five-day trip to Boulogne and a German exchange scheme; the history department took a group of pupils to Poland, including a visit to Auschwitz; the design and technology department arranges visits to local firms. The English department has arranged Shakespeare and Dickens days, and visits to the theatre. A group of Year 8 pupils has visited a local primary school to teach the pupils about the dangers of smoking. A number of pupils took part in a summer school working with people with hearing difficulties. A small number of pupils enjoy a drama club and there are various musical rehearsals. There is, however, a relative lack of opportunities for drama and music-making leading to performances, and little in the way of visits to galleries or concerts. Artists in residence have been inspirational in art and have introduced pupils to new techniques.
48. The school has a well-established programme of personal and social education and good provision is made for education on sex, relationships, health, citizenship, European awareness and stress management for older pupils. This lively programme enriches the pupils' learning effectively as does the two weeks' work experience programme in Year 10. The programme of study for citizenship for pupils in Year 11, however, needs rewriting in line with the Year 2000 revision of the National Curriculum, and updating of the European studies element is also required.
49. Provision for careers and work-related education is good. There is a comprehensive programme of self assessment and other work-related learning such as preparing job applications and for interviews, and financial management, through the personal development lessons from Year 7 onwards. The effectiveness of this programme is sometimes weakened by unsatisfactory teaching. In Year 10 every pupil has a two-week work experience and pupils on the GNVQ course in health and social care undertake a number of workplace visits to residential homes and special schools. In Year 10 and Year 11, pupils are interviewed about their plans for work or further education, individually and in groups, by an adviser from the County Careers Service, who also speaks to groups in school. Visitors from a number of employers and training agencies come into school to talk to pupils and take part in careers evenings. Further vocational links are

provided through the 'twilight courses' at Darlington College. There are good links with sixth form colleges for pupils to further their personal education, and many pupils go on to further education.

50. The effectiveness of relationships with partner institutions is also strong in terms of primary school links. In addition to the health education initiative referred to elsewhere, a tradition has been established of links between subject departments and the neighbouring primary schools. Liaison is also good at a pastoral and guidance level, and information is transmitted about pupils who have special educational needs.

### **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

51. The school's provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Students are aware of the importance the school places on respect for other people. The promotion of good moral attitudes and social behaviour continue to be a strength of the school.
52. Arrangements for spiritual development are better than at the time of the last inspection. They are satisfactory but not yet a strength. All staff have received training designed to improve their awareness of the spiritual dimension which could enhance their teaching. In English, for instance, all schemes of work contain a reference to developing spiritual awareness. Not all departments follow this principle. School assemblies include time for a prayer, often spoken by a pupil, followed by time for reflection. Space does not allow all pupils to attend an assembly every day. There is no regular time for reflection directed by form tutors when their pupils are not in assembly.
53. Provision for pupils' moral development is very good. Pupils have a clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong. The school makes it clear that there will be no tolerance of bullying, violence or racism. Such attitudes are developed in lessons, in assemblies, in activities such as the school council, and in the whole ethos of the school. In history, pupils will encounter the moral context of the Holocaust, and in geography they learn about global warming. In mathematics they are led to see how logical thinking can help them consider the moral consequences of their actions. In a lesson on personal and social education pupils discussed the implications of teenage parenting. Reward schemes such as PRIDE, and the completion of Records of Achievement, also give pupils a sense of responsibility for their actions. Many other activities promote moral awareness. Pupils take part in Macmillan Coffee Mornings, Children in Need, Jeans for Genes, the Old Folks Party, a crime prevention group, a drugs awareness day, and the highly successful health day. The school council is impressive, giving its members a strong sense of responsibility. The council has successfully undertaken charity fund-raising, visits to primary schools, refurbishment of toilets, provision of a payphone, setting up a buddy scheme, and much else. Pupils are rightly proud of what they have achieved.
54. Social development is good. Extra-curricular activities in sport encourage team spirit and co-operation, as do the many visits abroad, such as the German exchange. Pupils help each other well in mathematics lessons and art. The peer group tutoring initiative involves pupils in devising and leading advice sessions for primary school pupils. The summer school for able pupils develops social awareness and confidence as well as providing intellectual stimulus. Work experience for Year 10, now lasting two weeks, does much to cultivate social skills. Pupils benefit from lessons in citizenship, and from many visits organised by the English department.
55. Cultural development is satisfactory: it is good in some subjects such as art, history, English, and mathematics, but weaker in drama and music. English gives pupils a wide experience of literature which includes much from Africa and the Caribbean. The Learning Resource Base is a major cultural asset. In mathematics there are displays of Greek, Chinese and Russian numerals and calculations, besides discussion of how much other cultures have contributed to mathematics. Pupils experience the music of Northern India in Year 8 and Caribbean music in Year 9. Drama is given far less prominence than in most schools. It is taught as part of the English course in Key Stage 3, but there is no GCSE course. *Ali Baba* was presented a year ago, but there are no current plans for a production this year. A number of pupils enjoy the drama club and various musical activities, but extra-curricular provision in drama and music is relatively weak.

56. Since the last inspection the school has improved the development of moral and social awareness. The last inspection stated that a significant minority of pupils did not accept the school's moral code, and that moral issues were superficially dealt with. This is certainly no longer the case. There is still scope for enhancing spiritual and cultural development, and further strengthening pupils' understanding of the wider world through education in citizenship and through the work of subject departments.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?**

57. The school provides a caring and considerate environment in which good provision is made for the welfare and guidance of the pupils.
58. Pupils remain with the same form tutor as they progress through the school and this allows them to build positive relationships with staff. Year heads develop the necessary expertise associated with each year of school life, from liaison with primary feeder schools to GCSE option choices and careers advice. A well co-ordinated structure involving heads of department, heads of year and form tutors ensures that pupils receive effective day-to-day support. Pupils feel that teachers are aware of their needs and mainly opportunities to meet those needs effectively.
59. More emphasis has been put on the academic monitoring of pupils since the last inspection without losing the positive pastoral care for the pupils. A computerised records system identifies pupils' achievement by means of a range of tests and assessments. The system identifies pupils who are underachieving in their work and provides a summary report that enables teachers to review the work set and to plan lessons to rectify that underachievement.
60. Form tutors monitor attendance in the first instance and inform year heads, who contact parents by telephone when pupils are absent. Regular monitoring of pupils' records of attendance and punctuality is undertaken by the attendance administration officer. The educational welfare officer works in close co-operation with the school, visiting pupils' homes where regular patterns of absence emerge. Rewards and certificates are presented to pupils each term if they achieve 100 per cent attendance and rewards are also linked to positive competition through the house system. This further encourages pupils to attend school regularly.
61. Maintaining good behaviour is a high priority in the school and is strongly supported through the PRIDE scheme. There has been a good improvement in behaviour since the last inspection. Staff have substantially reduced the congestion around stairwells and cramped corridors by providing alternative routes for pupils away from congested areas, combined with improved yet unobtrusive supervision. However, the school urgently needs to remedy the heavy congestion during the lunchtime when pupils queue for lunch. Pupils behaviour in some lessons is detrimentally affected by inadequacies in teaching, yet pupils' behaviour rarely becomes troublesome. There is an effective 'on call' system whereby nominated members of staff are able to intervene promptly in cases of disruption, including withdrawing the pupil from the lesson. Records of incidents are passed to heads of year and heads of department so that the causes can be explored. There is a detailed anti-bullying policy and the school prefect system also contributes to good management of behaviour.
62. Liaison with feeder primary schools is good, overall, and very good with those schools sending high numbers of pupils to the school. Teachers visit all schools to meet pupils and good links are developed by the special educational needs co-ordinator. This helps to ensure a smooth transfer to secondary school. Staff have observed how literacy and numeracy are taught in primary schools. Older pupils have also been involved in visiting primary schools. New pupils are supported by an induction day, staff visits and a technology day.
63. The careers service provides careers day presentations of high quality. Links with sixth form and further education colleges help to raise pupils' personal aspirations, by highlighting the greater career potential available to them by continuing their education. A link with a university also helps to raise pupils' aspirations.
64. The school generally takes a responsible approach to the health and safety of the pupils. Regular safety checks are conducted in co-operation with the local education authority and specialist

external firms. A member of staff conducts a school-wide risk assessment and priorities for action are set. Short-term action is generally carried out by the school caretaker. Some items of concern were noted during the inspection, however, and these need to be addressed by the school: these include full guarding of the pottery kiln, ensuring that pupils do not enter public areas of the school in studded sports boots and the condition of windows in the tower block. The arrangements for child protection are satisfactory and appropriate action is taken to monitor any concerns raised.

## **Assessment**

65. Assessment is generally good and shows a distinct improvement since the previous inspection.
66. The school has a concise policy, which indicates the rationale and purposes of assessment and provides guidelines on good practice. Departments are given considerable freedom to devise and implement their own assessment systems, which most have done successfully in order to meet National Curriculum and examination boards' requirements. In many departments there has been a clear focus on identifying and rectifying weaknesses in pupils' work and this has helped pupils to progress. Marking and assessment of pupils' class and homework are done regularly and consistently in most departments but there is scope for further improvement, particularly in science and geography. Elements of self-assessment are a feature in history but are less well developed in other subjects. Detailed records are kept within departments and examples of pupils' work are kept by most. The whole-school assessment policy has been led by the headteacher and this has ensured its being seen as a major element in raising standards within the school. To support this there have been regular and valuable in-service training sessions provided for all staff.
67. The school has developed extensive systems to monitor the academic progress of individual pupils through data which is collected centrally and fed back to departments. Pupils identified as underachieving are targeted for improvement by the departments. Data is collected and used to track progress at three levels - pupil, department and school. A data tracking team has been formed, using Key Stage 2 and 3 tests, NFER reading tests, MIDYIS, YELLIS, GCSE and teachers' internal assessment. This is a considerable improvement on previous practice. This information allows the school and departments to identify degrees of progress during key stages, predict grades for individual pupils and set targets for them, as well as providing a schedule for mentoring pupils in Year 11. The use of assessment data does however need to be further developed so that the information collected is used to identify the achievement of different groups, by ethnic background, ability or gender.
68. Many departments also need to evaluate the data more rigorously in order to deal with any weaknesses that emerge and to monitor the impact of developments on pupils' performance.
69. There have been improvements in identifying the needs of pupils with special educational needs. Liaison takes place with the local primary schools who provide information on pupils. A reading test is given to all pupils in Year 7 and any who are having problems with reading are placed on the special needs register. However, further assessments of attainment and reviews of progress are unsatisfactory. The progress pupils make is not being recorded or reviewed regularly and the targets set for them to reach are too imprecise to be useful. Good efforts are made to involve parents (please see the following section).
70. The learning needs of pupils with English as an additional language are carefully assessed, through direct observation and liaison with their parents. Ways of aligning the recording of their language development with National Curriculum levels of attainment are being studied. The progress of these pupils is monitored on an individual basis.

## HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

71. The quality of information provided for parents was judged to be satisfactory at the last inspection. Some of the comments from the parents attending the meeting before the inspection, and an analysis of the parents' questionnaire, confirm that the range and depth of communication with parents remain satisfactory. A significant minority of parents, however, do not believe that they receive sufficient information to inform them of how well their children are progressing in their studies. Some consider that the July consultation evening for parents of younger children is too late to lead to valuable co-operation and that links with parents are insufficient. This inspection found, through examining examples of the records of attainment sent annually to parents, that the records do not provide sufficient information on how well children are doing, what skills they have developed or areas of weakness. Often, advice on how learning can be improved is unclear. The school should consider how to improve collaboration with parents to improve learning and standards.
72. Information of a more general nature is provided through a regular newsletter of good quality, containing news of school activities, planned developments and pupils' achievements. The governors' annual report and school prospectus are also good, though omitting some statutory information: they do not inform parents of their right to withdraw children from religious education and collective worship; they do not include details of school facilities not accessible to pupils with disabilities, or arrangements to ensure that pupils with disabilities are not being treated less favourably than other pupils.
73. Homework diaries provide a further channel of communication. Parents are encouraged to use them as a two-way communication, but this is still rare. Some parents do not believe that sufficient homework is given, and some are concerned that older pupils are set an unmanageable amount of work to do at any one time. In the absence of a homework timetable, the school should ensure that the homework set is regularly monitored.
74. The parents' association is very supportive and keen to raise funds to buy equipment and resources otherwise not available to the school. These have included televisions and video recorders and, recently, sound amplification system for whole-school activities in the main school hall.
75. The school provides a welcoming and open environment for parents and visitors and encourages them to become involved in the daily life of the school, though few parents are able to respond to this invitation.
76. The school seeks to involve parents in discussing their children's special educational needs. Parents are informed at the earliest stage of the procedures for the assessment. They are invited to attend any review meetings and often do so. If they are not able to come, they are contacted by telephone. Their opinions are recorded on the individual programmes.
77. The visiting specialist for English as an additional language has developed a broad role, including discussion with the parents of new pupils, and accompanying them if they wish at parents' consultation evenings. She has identified three successful adults with a similar background to the pupils, who serve as mentors for older pupils. Where necessary, she co-operates with the educational welfare officer in improving the attendance of a pupil.
78. The school maintains strong relationships with the wider community, and maintains its established link with the Durham Business and Enterprise Executive. The careers programme seeks to give pupils a sound awareness of the world of work and this leads effectively into all Year 10 pupils' undertaking a two-week work placement, which is well structured. This is followed by discussions about future choices and a programme of advice by the Careers Advisory Service. The school supports this activity through more specific information from the school careers library. Pupils have the opportunity to consider continuing their education through links with local colleges.
79. Older pupils have developed good contact with primary schools, including mentoring Year 6 pupils on health issues and the development of school councils. A wide range of visits is undertaken, including residential visits for orienteering and day visits such as to the continental market in

Shildon and the Birds of Prey Centre at Sion Hill Hall. Overseas visits have been made to Prague in the Czech Republic and to Mulheim in Germany, where the school has a partnership with the Otto Pankok Schule. Year 9 pupils can take part in annual skiing holidays in Italy.

80. Other visitors enrich the curriculum for the pupils, such as the police in conjunction with the drugs awareness programme, a local author who supports the development of literacy and visiting staff from a local bank. A particularly important link is with the school nurse who supports the health and sex education programme, and a stress counsellor prepares Year 11 pupils for taking GCSE examinations. Pupils of all ages support fundraising activities for charities of their choice.
81. The school develops its good links with primary schools and records are passed on as pupils transfer to the school. Teachers' links with local primary schools have been developed, enabling teachers to gain fuller understanding of the primary curriculum, to support numeracy in the primary school and to ensure continuity of education as pupils transfer.
82. The overwhelming majority of pupils leaving the school in the summer term of 2000 successfully secured employment, college places or youth training.

### **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

83. Despite unforeseen changes in its senior management team in recent years, the school is well managed, with a very clear direction for its development. The impact of new policies and procedures on achievement and the school's ethos is already strong.
84. The previous headteacher became seriously ill and died within four years of his appointment. He had begun to transform the school, raising achievement while sustaining a caring ethos. This direction was well sustained by his deputy, later acting headteacher, who was appointed to the headship only several months before the inspection. The head and senior management team, as well as other key staff, have successfully taken the school through a potentially difficult stage. They have been intent on improvement, rather than cautiously treading water. At present, a number of the senior positions are held on a temporary basis, but it is expected to be able to form a permanent senior team in the near future.
85. There has been a strong emphasis on raising achievement and transforming teaching and learning. The head and other senior managers have systematically observed teaching across all subjects, focusing on specific issues including those identified as weak by the last inspection and a subsequent visit by HMI. A sound agreement was reached with staff to ensure that this would not be experienced as threatening, and the process has helped teachers to become more reflective about their own teaching and to share a direction for the improvement of teaching across the school. Many departments, though not all, have successfully continued this monitoring and reflection. The challenge for the school will be to continue the momentum of this learning process through further sharing of good practice within and between departments and through further opportunities for observation and guidance of teaching, often between peers, within a planned staff development process.
86. Professional development arrangements are well organised and effectively managed by a senior member of staff. Staff training needs are closely matched to whole-school priorities and departmental needs. Non-teaching staff are included in the staff development programme. Heads of departments are charged with the responsibility of assessing the impact of training on classroom practice and this is monitored effectively by the senior manager. Training has been focused on raising achievement, performance management and improving staff skills in ICT. The school has been successful in securing funds from the New Opportunities Fund to develop ICT skills. Good arrangements are in place for the induction of newly appointed and newly qualified teachers. Teachers on initial teacher training receive good support and guidance.
87. There has been an interesting variety of approaches to staff development. The whole-school literacy strategy has included school-based staff training, a network of subject representatives, and the internal publication of ideas for writing frames. A 'collaborative learning' initiative is run for Year 8 pupils in the Learning Resource Base, and teachers are invited to participate and observe. School-based training has taken place on raising boys' achievement. These practices are well in

advance of most schools, but more time may need to be devoted to some processes in order to transform teaching as intended.

88. The school has a longstanding tradition of caring for its pupils, and this has been well sustained, despite some fears that an increasing emphasis on achievement could detract from this. The heads of year play a major role in pastoral and academic guidance, and often have major whole-school responsibilities. There is good management of disruptive incidents, and withdrawals from lessons are reported to the heads of year. Every effort is made to avoid exclusions from school. Pupils' personal and social development is monitored along with their academic progress. A major focus for improvement in the school's ethos is the development of pupils' personal and social responsibility. The school council is a strength of the school, and pupils are involved in discussing improvements in the accommodation.
89. The curriculum is generally well managed. The former tendency to place pupils in lower sets partly because of their behaviour has been stopped, and sets no longer have a very narrow ability range, but further thought needs to be devoted to the present pattern of setting. Departments are efficiently run and generally well managed. In many subjects there is a strong co-operation and sharing of good ideas, but some departments need to improve procedures for promoting consistently high quality of teaching and learning. Decisive action has been taken to improve courses, including the introduction of GNVQ, a half GCSE for religious education, and modular certification for all senior pupils for ICT. The visiting teacher of English as an additional language, despite limited time, works effectively in co-operation with English teachers in particular and has developed a broad role, including liaison with parents and outside agencies, introducing mentoring, and training mainstream staff. The management of special educational needs provision has improved and there is a good policy, but the teacher responsible has had major whole-school responsibilities which have inevitably reduced the time devoted to this role. An inclusive philosophy has been established, but recently the management of assessment and provision has not been rigorous enough. There has been a major transformation in the management of ICT, which has greatly improved pupils' access and use. Training for staff has been well planned. In line with the revised National Curriculum, the ICT opportunities within each subject need to be incorporated into schemes of work.
90. The development of a Learning Resource Base, combining lending and reference libraries with extensive computer access, has been a major achievement. Such provision is clear-sighted, given the transformations in education which are inevitably going to take place. This facility is very well managed; the environment is welcoming and efficiently organised; pupils receive good personal assistance to develop confidence and positive attitudes in using resources; old and unattractive books have been replaced; and availability of computer software for researching and writing has been strongly developed.
91. Policy development is effective, and staff are fully involved. Processes include discussion by the whole staff, meetings of middle managers, department meetings, a policy and practice group including younger teachers, and termly staff meetings divided into three discussion groups. The school has recently produced a good new policy on equal opportunities and anti-racism. The school development plan is well focused on six major priority areas, and forms the basis for departmental planning. Financial planning is dynamic and securely based on developmental priorities.
92. The school management has a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of staff. Procedures are being developed for performance management. The danger that new procedures could jeopardise collaborative approaches to sharing good practice and peer observation and coaching are clearly recognised. Data on pupils' achievement are being increasingly studied in order to improve the curriculum, teaching and learning, and work is underway in transforming data into a form in which they can be more easily used by staff.
93. The governing body is clearly committed to the school. Governors have supported it well through its recent difficulties. Many governors have assigned links to particular departments, and visit the school regularly. They are kept well informed by well-written termly statements from the headteacher, and steer school and policy developments by asking and debating critical questions. One governor with a financial background contributes his expertise in assisting financial



management, and another governor regularly hears pupils read. The governors have been effective in helping the school to move forward, in order to provide a better education for pupils in the area.

94. Non-teaching staff play a significant role in school management. The secretarial staff are efficient, helpful and welcoming, and help to establish a positive and caring ethos. The caretaker and cleaners maintain the school environment well, despite the difficulties of some parts of the building.
95. Overall, the school is very well led. It is well managed, both in its development processes and on a daily basis. There are inevitably areas for further development, but considering the newness of the headteacher and senior team, their achievements have been remarkable.

## **Finance**

96. The financial management of the school is good. The school has responded well to the recommendations of the recent audit report by producing a draft financial policy and a time-scale for the full implementation of other aspects of the report. The school has a budget which is below both national and local averages. Spending is managed well, within this budget, with a minimal surplus carried between years. Departmental funding is by a basic allowance per pupil, which is supplemented by bids for development funding. Financial reviews by the headteacher and governors take place at regular intervals, ensuring firm control of spending. Heads of departments have access to details of their spending at any time, promoting good budgetary control. The governing body effectively monitors procedures and gives excellent support in obtaining 'fair funding' from the local education authority, and effective efforts are made by the school to provide best value and quality when purchasing resources and services. Recent refurbishing of science laboratories and the choice of computer network equipment are examples of the quality of products overriding cost imperatives if necessary, in order to provide better educational service. Positive initiatives are taken to enhance provision by bidding for additional grants. Major recent projects have resulted in the refurbishment of some science and design technology areas. Strategic financial planning is very good. The provision of ICT equipment has been greatly enhanced by utilising government grants. The school's bid for 'Sports College' status is on hold owing to changes in regulations; however, there is currently a bid for National Lottery funding, which will require the school to provide a proportion of the total project costs. The school has outline plans to meet this financial requirement. The school is very effective in using specific grants for designated purposes and supplements the special educational needs budget from other income. Although the school supplements the funds provided by the local education authority for special needs, the funds are still inadequate to provide satisfactory levels of support. A particular difficulty arises from statements of special need which do not adequately provide for pupils' needs. The low budget has an adverse effect on the provision of basic resources and basic repairs to the school, and continued pressure will be needed to improve this.

## **Staffing, accommodation and learning resources**

97. The pupil-teacher ratio in the school is significantly worse than normally found. Through good planning, there are sufficient appropriately qualified teachers to teach the subjects of the curriculum and there is a good match between what teachers are qualified to teach and their deployment in the classroom. However, there is no qualified teacher with expertise in special education needs other than the deputy head, and some key staff combine subject management with major whole-school roles. Where pupils are taught by non-specialist teachers this does not have a detrimental effect on the quality of education pupils receive. The school has effectively managed the difficulties presented by long term absences in some areas and given temporary staff adequate support. The Learning Resource Base is very well run by the Curriculum Support Manager, assisted by other staff. Technician support for the extensive ICT network is good. In design and technology and in art, however, technician time is inadequate to meet routine maintenance needs or provide adequate classroom support, a situation which has not improved since the last inspection.
98. The school environment is far from ideal, mainly because of the lack of space and the inadequate condition of some parts of the school. For instance, in the history classrooms, ill fitting windows cause draughts and uncomfortable working conditions and there is inadequate storage. The accommodation for science is insufficient. The school has financed the refurbishment of two laboratories, which are well designed to cater for practical work, whole-class instruction and

collaboration in groups, but other areas are well worn and reflect past provision. There is only one music room and during each week, nine music lessons have to be taught in other rooms across the school. It is impossible to transport necessary equipment to some of these rooms. Some rooms are too small for the number of pupils they accommodate. This restricts the range of teaching strategies that teachers can use. For instance, the Learning Resource Base which is very well organised, has to be used for ICT lessons, and on some days there is insufficient space and equipment when classes are particularly large. The recent building of two extra classrooms and refurbishment of the textiles and food areas confirm that the headteacher and governors are making every effort to resolve some of the accommodation problems. The playground area is uneven, with potential trip hazards. The school lacks social areas for pupils. The dining area is inadequate for the size of the school, and there is serious congestion when queuing. Further plans have been drawn up to refurbish accommodation for design and technology and art, and to decorate adjacent areas.

99. The school premises are maintained in a high state of cleanliness by the site supervisor and his team and this makes a positive contribution to the ethos of the school. The quality of display is good and often enhances areas which are in need of decoration. The installation of the security fence around the school has greatly reduced the vandalism experienced by the school in the past. Several staff in many subject areas have turned to decorating their own rooms in order to improve the quality of the environment. Options are being actively explored to improve the school grounds, including a plan drawn up by pupils to create a covered social area in the yard and transformations to the sports facilities.
100. While learning resources are just about satisfactory in most subjects, spending is below the national average. In science, for example, there is a shortage of textbooks. Despite recent improvements, which has brought the pupil to computer ratio to 8:1, several subjects lack sufficient computers and access to the well-booked ICT rooms and Learning Resource Base is a problem. Good work has been done in replacing old and unattractive books, but the quantity of books in the library (9 books to each pupil) is still below the Library Association's recommendation. The library is very well used, particularly during the lunch periods when all computers are constantly used to aid pupils' learning. Many departments make good use of external facilities for visits and fieldwork.

## **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

101. In order to raise pupils' achievement and the standard of education further, the school should take the following actions:
- 1) Develop teaching so that there are more opportunities for pupils to think for themselves, including problem solving, discussion and research. (Paragraph: 27)
  - 2) Establish a more precise analysis of pupils' special educational needs, and improve provision for teaching reading for those pupils with serious weaknesses. (Paragraphs: 9, 42 and 69)
  - 3) Provide clearer information to parents and other carers on their children's progress, so that they can collaborate more effectively with the school. (Paragraph: 71)
  - 4) Seek an improvement of funding in order to better resource the pupils' education, and continue to seek developments in accommodation. (Paragraphs: 96-100)
102. In addition, consideration should be given to strategies for numeracy across the curriculum (Paragraph: 15), for enhancing provision for very able and talented pupils (Paragraph: 45), and to improve cultural development (Paragraph: 55).

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	154
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	46

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3	23	45	23	6	1	0

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

### Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Years 7-11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	938
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	165

Special educational needs	Years 7-11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	10
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	172

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	13

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	25
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	26

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.5
National comparative data	7.9

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	1.4
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	96	104	200

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	65	64	58
	Girls	87	70	55
	Total	152	134	113
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	76 (60)	66 (64)	56 (52)
	National	64 (64)	66 (62)	60 (54)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	35 (27)	47 (37)	25 (21)
	National	24 (28)	38 (38)	26 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	61	68	65
	Girls	78	75	72
	Total	139	143	137
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	68 (75)	70 (69)	70 (57)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	26 (33)	45 (42)	27 (22)
	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	89	86	175

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	31	79	83
	Girls	37	83	85
	Total	68	162	168
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	39 (41)	93 (92)	96 (98)
	National	49 (47)	89 (91)	94 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	33.9 (35.6)
	National	38.7 (38.0)

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

### **Ethnic background of pupils**

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	4
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	9
Chinese	1
White	924
Any other minority ethnic group	0

### **Exclusions in the last school year**

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	28	2
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

### **Teachers and classes**

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	50.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	19.0

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y11**

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	247

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	26
Key Stage 4	22.5

### **Financial information**

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	2070723
Total expenditure	2078344
Expenditure per pupil	2262
Balance brought forward from previous year	41679
Balance carried forward to next year	34058

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

938

Number of questionnaires returned

279

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	34	55	7	3	1
My child is making good progress in school.	41	55	1	0	3
Behaviour in the school is good.	32	56	5	0	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	28	56	13	2	0
The teaching is good.	36	54	4	1	5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	26	47	21	4	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	46	44	4	3	4
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	57	41	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	30	44	19	2	5
The school is well led and managed.	37	53	2	1	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	37	52	6	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	39	45	8	0	8

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

### **ENGLISH**

103. Standards in English are in line with national averages at age 14 but below at age 16, both in terms of test and examination results and in the work observed during the inspection. When pupils enter the school, they are slightly below the national average, with particular weaknesses in reading; a third of pupils are more than two years behind. Results in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 have been in line with national averages for the last three years and exceeded them in the year 2000, indicating good progress through the key stage. Results are much better than in similar schools. However, GCSE results, though improving slightly, are still well below national averages in English. In English Literature the results are regularly very close to the national average, though only two thirds of pupils are entered. Girls performed very much better than boys in previous years, but in 2000 the gap narrowed and is currently less than the national difference between boys and girls. Nevertheless, GCSE results in English are above the norm for schools with a similar free school meal entitlement.
104. By the end of Key Stage 3 standards vary widely between the highest and lowest attaining pupils. In the best work pupils show that they can comment perceptively on the characters in a novel, such as *Roll of Thunder*, showing a sensitivity to the author's skill with words. Such reading inspires creative writing in a similar style. Equally imaginative work arose from a task about a school party being stranded on an island. The class used computers to research the flora, fauna and climate of islands and then word-processed their accounts. Standards for this class are well above expectations. The standards of lower attainers are well below normal expectation: handwriting is often hard to read, vocabulary narrow, and spelling weak.
105. Similar disparities were observed in Key Stage 4. The best work is lively and extensive, and pupils hand in essays of 2000 words or more. Pupils are asked to compare similar situations in different texts - for instance, the schools described in *Kestrel for a Knave* and in *Hard Times*. They are well guided through writing frames, and when the work is re-drafted and typed it reads well, but most pupils' essays deal with each story separately and contain little analysis. Close guidance by the teacher means that weaker pupils can attain grades D or E in the GCSE examinations rather than the lowest grades but such pupils do little more than re-tell a story rather than discuss its characters and their motivation. Imaginative use of language, sentence structure, paragraphing, width of vocabulary and spelling remain weak for many pupils. Pupils with special educational needs were observed to be making good progress in Year 11, discussing a marketing leaflet, and using it to devise one of their own.
106. Standards of speaking and listening are below national expectations. In one Key Stage 3 class, pupils studying Roald Dahl's autobiography were encouraged to voice their opinions about corporal punishment. This discussion was lively, but in other classes discussion was rare. In a Key Stage 4 lesson pupils spoke well about the relationship between an old man and his granddaughter, but many pupils were not involved and pupils were not required to listen attentively to what others were saying. The speaking of the witches' lines in *Macbeth* was poor. A few pupils improve their skill by entering a public speaking competition. The paucity of drama further restricts confidence in speaking.
107. The standard of reading is likewise rather below national expectation. Pupils can understand the drift of the text they are studying, but misunderstand relatively simple words. The weakest readers are encouraged through a home-reading scheme, and the scoring of merit points. The ablest readers have a specially prepared stock of adult novels from which to choose. However, the great majority of pupils suffer from the lack of a regular reading session. A scrutiny of books lent to pupils shows a huge variation between one class and another.
108. Standards of teaching are good in both key stages, but some weaknesses constrain progress. Strengths include good planning, knowledge of the subject, organisation, class management, enthusiasm, and developing constructive relationships. Teachers have a wide knowledge of contemporary and classical authors, and show a strong understanding of language and its historical development. Teachers set clear objectives and see that that they are achieved. A good use has been made of writing frames to help pupils structure their writing, but older pupils need to

be helped to achieve greater independence. Almost all teachers mark with unusual thoroughness, correcting mistakes assiduously. In the best lessons the teacher encouraged pupils to explore their own ideas, and discuss with each other, while still making it clear what was expected. Weaknesses arose from a dry approach to teaching skills, and giving the pupils too little independence. In some lessons the teacher did most of the talking, providing the pupils with little opportunity to work on their own, to ponder, to argue and to learn from each other. Pupils seldom use computers, either for independent research or to improve style through presentation and re-drafting. When they do the results are very good.

109. Many pupils learn well, and make good progress, particularly in Key Stage 3. Some pupils in middle sets, however, are making slower progress than they might as a result of much work that is routine, such as filling in words left blank. Consequently some pupils of average attainment are under-achieving. Some of the school's data suggests that pupils with special educational needs make less progress than they should in reading at Key Stage 3.
110. Since the last inspection GCSE and National Curriculum test results have improved and much has been done to organise the department systematically, with updated schemes of work, job descriptions, development objectives, and annual reviews. The chief weakness previously identified was underachievement, linked to low expectations, along with limited extended writing. In this there has been some improvement, but in calculating the balance between guidance and fostering pupils' independence teachers give too little weight to the latter. Pupils' extended writing is first well supported through writing frames, but then many do not proceed towards greater independence in writing in specific genres. There is still too little use of information and communication technology, largely for lack of access to computers. Progress of individuals is well recorded, and much support given, often out of school hours, but there needs to be more analysis of attainment data. There is much sharing of ideas among teachers, but little direct observation of one another's lessons. The great strength of the department is the co-operation and commitment of its members, observed both in lessons and in many extra-curricular activities, providing a firm basis for further improvement.

## **MATHEMATICS**

111. Standards in mathematics have improved since the previous inspection. At the end of Year 9, standards are above the national average. In 2000, the proportion of pupils reaching average levels was similar to the national average, but the proportion achieving Level 6 and above rose to well above the national norm. Boys and girls perform equally well. These standards are higher than expected, indicating good achievement, given the pupils' average starting point in Year 7 and results in similar schools.
112. GCSE results in 2000 were close to the national average and good compared with similar schools. Boys did better than girls in gaining the highest grades but girls did better overall. The results in 2000 showed continuing improvement in performance since the last inspection. Overall, achievement is good when comparing pupils' performance to their test results when in Year 9.
113. Observations of lessons and pupils' work indicate a continuing improvement in the standard of work. At the end of Year 9, most pupils understand the basic rules of algebra and arithmetic and can apply these to solving equations and geometric problems, and calculating exterior and interior angles. They can represent data in a variety of forms but the quality of graphic work varies widely. High attaining pupils, in Year 9, can solve simultaneous equations and can produce and analyse cumulative frequency graphs. Lower attaining pupils of the same age do particularly well in understanding the collection and presentation of data and grasp the methodology associated with many mathematical processes. Their pace of progress is, however, slowed by lack of fundamental number skills. In a lesson developing the skills of trial and improvement, these pupils were able to understand and perform the process but were limited in their ability to make informed judgements owing to inadequate understanding of basic number relationships.
114. Pupils with special educational needs do well in all years and by the end of Year 11 have achieved much higher standards than expected, when judged against their low level of attainment when they entered the school in Year 7. Almost all achieve a GCSE grade.



115. Standards observed in Year 10 and 11 lessons were better than the most recent examination results indicate. By the end of Year 10, high attaining pupils have covered all topics contained in the 'intermediate' level examination and embark on 'higher' level topics. In Year 11 lessons, these pupils study to levels of 'exceptional performance' when solving triangles using sine and cosine rules for the general triangle, or finding areas of sectors and lengths of arcs. In a Year 11 lesson for higher attainers, pupils were determining the 'frequency density' and modal values of histograms, showing insight into the concepts developed. Average attaining pupils, in Year 11, show a good grasp of algebra when working with graphs in four quadrants and determining algebraic rules from number sequences. The lower attaining pupils were seen working successfully using formulae associated with the circle. They successfully used calculators to determine the circumference and rounded the answers when required. Pupils of all ability levels make good progress towards gaining a creditable GCSE grade.
116. Teaching is good for all age groups. During the inspection, the teaching was good in most lessons, and in two was very good. The good organisation and teachers' high expectations of pupils, together with challenging work and a respect for the individual, enabled teachers to maintain good working relationships. Teachers' knowledge of their subject was used to provide challenging levels of work to pupils of all abilities. Pupils in Year 7 mixed ability groups learn well because teachers use appropriate levels of language and examples of varying difficulty, which enable pupils to understand the mathematical ideas being taught. In a Year 7 lesson where pupils investigated the symmetry of shapes, the teacher's description of the task and her development of accurate technical vocabulary ensured that all pupils made good progress. Teachers establish an atmosphere of trust and co-operation, so that pupils are not afraid of asking questions. All lessons are well planned and have a number of different activities to maintain pupils' interest. These involved a brisk test or mental task at the start of each lesson and good development of the main point followed by a review of what had been learned. Increasing use is made of ICT. The least successful teaching occurred when there was an insufficient introduction to the task and there was a lack of pace and challenge, allowing some disruptive pupils to take advantage.
117. The marking of pupils' class-work and some homework is variable, but the marking of tests and the homework booklets in Years 10 and 11 is very good and is supported by helpful comments. Teachers use the school's reward system well to encourage full participation in learning. Formal assessments are accurate and the department's system of recording pupils' achievement provides the basis for individual target setting. However, the reports to parents are unsatisfactory in their lack of detail of what the pupils know and what they must do to improve. Analysis of examination data has helped to identify areas for development to improve pupils' achievement.
118. The clear leadership and management of the subject, well supported by all staff, have been the major contributing factors in raising achievement since the last inspection. By providing clear guidelines in schemes of work for Years 7 to 9, good progression through the curriculum has been established. The recently accelerated progress through the course for older pupils has ensured that they are all challenged to achieve their highest potential. The co-ordinated efforts of all staff and their willingness to adapt to new methods have contributed significantly to improving levels of achievement since the last inspection. Consistency and quality of teaching and the quality of pupils' work are not formally monitored by the head of department, which limits the sharing of the best methods and allows some variations in the quality of presentation of pupils' work.
119. There has been strong improvement since the previous inspection. Standards have risen in national tests at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. The issues of lack of challenge, low expectations, underused ICT and lessons which lack inspiration have all been successfully addressed. The department has successfully introduced the National Numeracy Initiative, is supporting the Literacy Initiative and continues to focus on raising achievement.

## SCIENCE

120. Standards for pupils at age 14 are now broadly in line with the national average. Attainment in National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds up to 1998 was below the national average. The department has ensured that for the last two years attainment has been close to the national average. When compared with schools with pupils from similar backgrounds the pupils' performance is also average. Results in science have been below those in mathematics and English for the last two years. There is no significant difference in the performance of boys compared with that of girls.
121. Standards for pupils at age 16 are below the national average, from the evidence of both the recent GCSE results and the inspection. However, this year an increased number of pupils achieved A and A\* grades. There is no significant difference between boys' and girls' results.
122. Average pupils in Year 9 have a satisfactory awareness of previous work on reflection but their understanding of the refraction of light is very sketchy. The knowledge and understanding of the highest attaining pupils of previous work on energy is rather superficial. They can give examples of renewable and non-renewable forms of energy, but they are unable to explain the principles behind generating electricity in a power station. Pupils' laboratory skills at the age of 14 are in line with expectations. Their understanding of the principles of fair testing is satisfactory but the majority cannot explain properly what the implications are if variables are not controlled.
123. The highest attainers in Year 11 have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of forces. They are able to apply their knowledge well to the concept of balanced forces causing an object either not to move or to move at constant speed. Pupils remember less well the formula connecting force with mass and acceleration. Middle attaining pupils in Year 11 have expected levels of factual recall, and understanding of previous work on the key terms used in electricity. Pupils of all ages depend too much on help from their teachers when making predictions and drawing conclusions about the experimental work.
124. Overall, taking the relevant factors into account, achievement is broadly satisfactory at both key stages. The unsatisfactory Key Stage 3 results before 1999 have been improved to being close to the national average. Although GCSE results were still below average in 2000, this group of pupils had made reasonable progress from a relatively low base at age 14.
125. Pupils' learning is satisfactory at all ages. Year 9 pupils, irrespective of their prior attainment, develop well, for example when respiration or how muscles work. Higher attaining Year 8 pupils learn very successfully when heat transfer, and can explain the process of convection in terms of what the particles in a liquid or gas are doing. Mixed ability classes in Year 7 make satisfactory progress when classifying vertebrates, but the lower attaining needed more appropriate tasks and resources. Highest attaining pupils in Year 11 learn effectively when studying genetic engineering, in terms of the technical and the moral issues. Average pupils also learnt effectively about transformers. Sometimes a teacher fails to control some disruptive behaviour and too little work is covered. The department selects subject specific targets for pupils with special educational needs from their individual education plans, but the targets are too vague to monitor progress, and there is insufficient use of specially adapted resources.
126. Pupils' attitudes to learning are satisfactory. Behaviour is generally good, so that most pupils have every opportunity to learn. Pupils work very well together when carrying out experiments. They work safely, making every effort to follow instructions carefully. When moving around the laboratory to collect materials and equipment, they act responsibly. During whole-class discussions they answer questions courteously and to the best of their ability, though some pupils call out their answers without waiting for a signal.
127. The style of teaching fails to provide pupils with enough opportunities to develop their independent thinking. More opportunities should be given for younger pupils to make hypotheses and to evaluate the outcomes of their practical work for themselves. This approach would give greater challenge to their intellect and prepare them better for the coursework investigations to be covered for their GCSE.

128. Despite these negative features, teaching is satisfactory overall for all age groups. This is a relatively experienced team of teachers who support each other well. Teachers set high standards for discipline, which are mostly achieved. Teachers have very good subject knowledge. Lessons are carefully planned, often using a range of resources and methods. Exercise books are marked regularly, but supportive comments are not used sufficiently. There are still some inconsistencies in marking. Pupils have a low awareness of the grading system and are not given sufficient information about how to improve. Sometimes they are allowed to leave work incomplete, hindering revision.
129. The subject's contribution to improving basic skills of literacy and numeracy is unsatisfactory. Key words are displayed, but sometimes not well valued. Only some teachers correct spelling mistakes. There is inconsistency in the quality and quantity of homework, partly because there aren't enough textbooks to take home. Sometimes work needs to be better adapted to pupils' needs. Reports for younger pupils do not identify strengths and weaknesses clearly, and insufficient use is made of target setting to improve results.
130. The department is soundly managed but more monitoring is required to improve marking, homework, specific targets for pupils with special educational needs, the adaptation of resources, and pupils' perception of the importance of modular tests. Useful strategies to raise attainment include short consolidation tests, the PRIDE system and the modular GCSE course. The technicians are efficient but have insufficient time. Accommodation is barely satisfactory, despite the well planned refurbishment of two laboratories, and some lessons have to be taught outside laboratories. There is a shortage of textbooks and sensors for data capture experiments. Storage space is inadequate, and all solutions should be marked with the appropriate hazard warning.
131. In response to the last inspection, the department has improved challenge in Years 7-9, provided better reference material particularly in the library, and designed more demanding worksheets. It needs to improve spelling, provide more formative comments, and improve the availability of textbooks. Above all else, pupils should be regularly encouraged to make predictions, suggest hypotheses and discuss conclusions after practical activities.

## **ART**

132. GCSE results for 2000 were above the national average and there has been a distinct improvement in recent years. All pupils who were entered for the examination were awarded a grade and the number who achieved grades A\*-C was above the national average. Girls did better than boys, but boys' results are also improving. Pupils who obtained low grades in other subjects often achieved the upper grades in art.
133. In the work seen during inspection, most pupils were achieving the expected standard at age 14 and many exceeded this. They are able to use drawing materials such as charcoal to produce large, bold and confident portraits which show a good ability to draw accurately and expressively and a good understanding of how to describe light and dark tones. In their paintings, pupils show that they are able to use their studies of works by well known artists to help them use different tools and textures when applying paint. These pupils use their sketchbooks well to prepare their work. In their annotated drawings and studies they show that they can evaluate their own work and that of different artists. The standards achieved by the end of the key stage provide all pupils with a good cultural awareness and form a sound basis for those who wish to study the subject further.
134. By the age of 16, pupils have consolidated their understanding of the subject's basic skills. They achieve good standards in relation to course requirements. In the work seen during the inspection they showed a very strong ability in their imaginative use of two-dimensional and three-dimensional media. One example of this was a wall hanging made by a pupil who had used computer scanned images of feathers printed on acetate and paper, which were assembled to make an exciting structure of light, colour and pattern. Sketchbooks are used well by pupils in order to record and develop ideas and they are able to discuss and to write their opinions about artists and styles in art, making good use of appropriate vocabulary.

135. Teaching in both key stages is good and often very good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and they enthuse about art in a way that captures the pupils' imagination and interest. They set high standards for behaviour and the quality of work to be done. Lessons are carefully planned and the care which the teachers show for all pupils, including those with special educational needs, enables them to make good progress. Teachers establish a very good rapport with their pupils, which enables them to feel secure and confident about expressing their ideas and volunteering opinions. This is a strength in the subject.
136. Because pupils of all ages are taught about the work of artists from different periods and cultures, they are able to create exciting and inventive work that shows a good understanding of different styles and traditions. Good examples are the large colourful masks made by Year 9 pupils which decorate the school hall and the beautifully constructed Japanese style mobiles made by Year 9 pupils hanging above the reading area in the learning resource centre. The pupils' ability to refer to artists in this way is another of the subject's strengths and makes a good contribution to the spiritual and cultural awareness of all pupils in the school.
137. The attitudes and behaviour of most pupils are good. They respond well to the positive direction and challenges which the teachers set and to the opportunities which exist for independent work. They show a good sense of responsibility and cooperate well with each other and the teachers.
138. The department has recently been able to invest in new computers, connected to the Internet, and pupils in all years are encouraged to use them in their research. This makes a good impact on their learning in both key stages and the department now needs to expand the use of information technology so that pupils are able to make further use of it as a designing tool in their creative work.
139. The subject is very well managed and led. The head of department has a clear vision for the subject's development and the teachers work very well as a team. Assessment procedures are good and marking is consistent, though teachers should try to ensure that pupils have a better understanding of how well they are meeting course requirements. Use is made of target setting but it is not always made clear to pupils what they must do to achieve the targets. Homework time is used well by the department as an important means of independent study but pupils sometimes find it difficult to manage their time, including the conflicting demands of different subjects. Some classes in Years 7-9 do not have art lessons every week, which can disturb the continuity of learning.
140. Although there is some help from the ICT technician, there is no art technician. This means that teachers spend time on tasks that could be better spent on those which more directly affect the quality of their teaching and pupil care. Suitable caging must be provided for two kilns so that it is impossible for pupils to have access to them, and warning notices must be displayed.
141. The department has made very good progress since the previous inspection. Standards have improved for all ages, as has pupils' knowledge of the academic aspects of art. This is now a strength, and opportunities for visiting galleries and museums and using visiting artists should be sustained. Although the range of activities available to pupils has improved, its further development is inhibited by the inadequate accommodation. Teachers make the best possible use of bleak and uninviting rooms but there is insufficient space for the more ambitious projects which are now a feature of good work at GCSE, and for the safe display and storage of pupils' work. Although care is taken, this means that pupils' coursework is vulnerable to loss and damage. Facilities for the display of pupils' work around the school are also limited, which constrains the opportunity for all members of the school community to celebrate and reflect upon pupils' achievements.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

142. GCSE results for technology subjects are well above the national average. This year 60 per cent of the pupils entered gained A\*-C grades against a national average of 51 per cent - a distinct improvement since the last inspection. The proportion of pupils gaining a grade in the A\*-G range is also above average. Pupils perform better in technology than in many other examination subjects and, in general, girls' results are better than boys'.

143. Attainment for 14-year-olds is also above average. Pupils develop good practical skills which lead to well made products and an appreciation of quality in their manufacture and finish. Tasks are presented to pupils of different abilities in ways that enable them to make an appropriate personal contribution to the outcome. For example, higher achieving Year 8 pupils designing and making a device for the handicapped were able to expand the work to incorporate complex mechanical and control devices. Lower achieving pupils were helped by the structured booklets to produce well-made working devices of less sophistication. Most pupils are able to understand and use technical vocabulary in an appropriate way. For example, pupils in a Year 8 resistant materials lesson could explain 'triangulation' and its function in strengthening a frame structure. All pupils are introduced to research techniques and most are able to analyse and annotate the collected material. Higher achieving pupils can use a range of sources, including the Internet, and make good use of computers to enhance the presentation of work. One pupil in textiles had used Internet research on the history of the sewing machine as background information for work on the modern machines in school. Most pupils are able to use basic graphic techniques to develop and record ideas but, generally, these skills are not well developed and some lower achieving pupils are limited to amending drawings and diagrams given on worksheets.
144. Strong evidence was found of above-average attainment for older pupils. Many pupils are able to work independently, conduct detailed research from a variety of sources and use data constructively when developing ambitious projects. Many GCSE folders in food and textiles, for example, contain relevant material presented to high standards, using ICT in addition to good hand-produced graphics and text. Pupils in a Year 11 textiles lesson used ICT skills for research and presentation purposes, analysed data and represented the results using pie and bar charts. Lower achieving pupils assemble design folders carefully but their work often lacks depth and accuracy. Standards of making across all the materials are good and sometimes very good. In resistant materials, for example, pupils use a wide range of constructional techniques for GCSE projects, which are made with care and precision. A pupil researching the needs of the elderly had successfully laminated the curved framework for the adjustable table she had designed. Good 'checklist' procedures ensure that all pupils cover all the relevant stages of the design process and that lower achieving pupils are able to meet the requirements of the course. Child development folders show that pupils make good use of word processing to complete notes and write extended contributions to a project.
145. The quality of learning is good throughout the school, and most pupils are able to build upon previous technology experience to work in a progressively more independent way. Good working habits and a capacity to think in a practical problem-solving way are established early in Key Stage 3. Where pupils are required to use these skills to make decisions about the nature and direction of their work, they contribute to good progress. For instance, Year 8 pupils designing a Roman ballista came to greater understanding of structures and mechanisms through discussion amongst themselves of how to devise and fit a locking device. Good progress was made in Year 10 resistant materials, where pupils of all abilities employed similar skills to develop ideas and make decisions on projects to design tap turning devices for the handicapped.
146. Attitudes are good, and pupils enjoy technology and are keen to participate. They have a high regard for quality in their work, take care with what they do and have pride in the outcome. Pupils co-operate well with one another and with teachers, which helps to create the good working atmosphere found in most working areas. Behaviour in lessons is good and where pupils are trusted to work independently they do so responsibly.
147. Teaching is consistently good. Knowledge, experience, hard work and good classroom management skills enable teachers to establish good relationships with pupils. Some classes are larger than recommended limits but there is normally a purposeful atmosphere. This is supported by good lesson planning and assessment procedures that clearly inform pupils of the National Curriculum level they are working at and what they have to do to improve. Teachers give good individual help and advice to pupils and use skilful strategies to develop their powers of independent thought and action. Teachers support the development of pupils' literacy skills through frequent references to technical vocabulary and good displays of key words. This could be strengthened further by a more consistent approach to marking pupils' work during the course of a project; more constructive comments would be of value in helping pupils to improve. The development of numeracy is not given a high enough priority. Teachers often manage a wide range of practical activities effectively. For example, the teacher of a Year 11 textiles group used good

individual negotiating skills to maintain the progress of pupils engaged in diverse individual tasks, including use of ICT equipment, hand sewing and machine overlocking. Occasionally, some explanations to the whole class are too long and do not involve pupils enough. Teachers use design projects to promote the social and moral development of pupils, as seen, for example, during a technology project in discussion of the needs of the handicapped. Year 10 pupils studying GNVQ health and social care, for example, came to greater understanding of the needs of the elderly through a well-conducted case study which required them to weigh the available evidence and make collective decisions. Pupils are made aware of cultural and multicultural issues through research into, for example, vegetarian diets and food from other countries.

148. The leadership and management of the department are good. The present dual leadership has worked very well and there is a common approach to technology. Schemes of work have been thoroughly revised and pupils receive a generally broad and balanced technology experience. Computer aided design and manufacture are being integrated into design projects at all levels. Electronics and computer control are taught to Key Stage 3 pupils but, as yet, there is no opportunity to continue with these at Key Stage 4. The introduction of GNVQ health and social care is a valuable contribution to the curriculum. Good assessment procedures are used to set targets and identify underachievement. Teachers provide appropriate support to pupils with special needs. Teaching is monitored, in order to improve quality, and staff developed is well targeted. The department makes a good contribution to the training of new teachers. A new computer network is improving standards. A food technology room and a textiles area have been extensively refurbished and now provide very good facilities, but the remaining food area is unwelcoming and resistant materials workshops are in need of re-decoration. There is inadequate technician support. Since the last inspection the school has improved teaching and examination results, standards in designing, the use of ICT, assessment procedures, and opportunities to develop literacy skills.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

149. Standards in geography are below expectations at both key stages. Recently the proportion gaining GCSE A\*-C grades has been well below the national average, but A\*-G results have been broadly in line with the national average. The subject is not a popular choice at Key Stage 4. Most pupils attain levels that are below the national average at the end of Key Stage 3. The school has not been successful enough in improving standards of attainment in external examinations since the last inspection, and many of the concerns raised at the previous inspection have not been fully addressed.
150. The standard of work observed was not high enough. By the end of Year 9, pupils have a basic grounding in geographical skills. Most can use and interpret maps but need more practice in the construction and analyses of graphical representation of statistical data. Knowledge of place is satisfactory but understanding of spatial patterns needs developing. Progress overall at Key Stage 3 is just satisfactory but in some classes high and middle attainers are not stretched enough. Pupils with special learning needs at Key Stage 3 have inadequate support from learning assistants. However, these pupils are well supported by teachers and overall make satisfactory progress. By the end of Year 11, pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of physical and human processes but are less secure in applying understanding of these concepts to new situations. The individual investigatory project work undertaken for GCSE needs much more emphasis in order to improve standards in the examination. There is significant underachievement at Key Stage 4 and pupils are not progressing as well as they should.
151. Despite these shortcomings, the teaching observed was never unsatisfactory. Teaching at Key Stage 3 was mainly good and at Key Stage 4 mainly satisfactory. Teachers are supportive and generally manage and control pupils well. Lessons are usually suitably planned and presented in a well structured way so that pupils understand what to do. The best teaching offers a variety of suitable learning opportunities that meet the needs of pupils through practical involvement and allows pupils to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills. Teaching is often lively and interesting and makes good use of topical material, as, for example, when newspaper cuttings of recent local floods were cleverly integrated into an explanation of the greenhouse effect and of renewable energy resources. When visual aids are used (for example, in Year 9 a video extract and a class demonstration of the effects of different seismic wave types) this produces good understanding of processes occurring within the earth's interior. The use of the overhead projector

to display links between pupils' knowledge of the structure of the earth and the patterns of continents on a world map was extremely successful in helping pupils to understand the theory of continental drift. These clarified the lesson's aims and significantly improved the quality of students' learning. However, in many lessons teaching is far too prescriptive and this constrains pupils' intellectual and personal development. There is insufficient challenge in the work and written tasks generally portray low expectations.

152. Learning would be enhanced by a clearer focus in lessons, by:
- i) sharing aims with pupils at the beginning of lessons and checking understanding at the end;
  - ii) consolidating and reinforcing the main teaching points visually;
  - iii) making regular use of a standing display, maps and atlases to develop understanding of geographical patterns and place;
  - iv) a stronger awareness of different needs when selecting materials and activities, particularly for high attainers; and
  - v) adapting material from textbooks for pupils with special educational needs.
153. Examination results would be improved by improving the retention and recall of knowledge through a planned study skills programme in Key Stage 3. A major obstacle that the school must tackle at Key Stage 4 is absence from lessons, and the department needs to target pupils' performance more rigorously and mark work more thoroughly and in a more developmental way. The extra support given by staff at lunchtimes and the revision and examination skills being developed are good and needs extending.
154. Literacy skills are generally well developed at both key stages, in reading strategies more than in writing. Numeracy skills are satisfactory. Fieldwork is effective and enriches the course, but there is insufficient at Key Stage 3, where study of physical landscape and of an area beyond the locality is needed. ICT is planned into the programme of study and has been developed since the last inspection, but there is a need for a coherent programme of ICT skills suitably linked to themes to ensure progression.
155. Pupils' attitudes to learning are mainly positive. Most are attentive, work conscientiously, apply themselves to their work and respond well to teaching. However, in a few lessons some older pupils were easily distracted and wasted time, leading to a low work rate and underachievement. Otherwise, behaviour is good. Pupils establish good relationships with their teachers and peers.
156. The subject is managed within a combined history/geography department but the needs of geography are not being satisfactorily met. A concerted effort is necessary to ensure that the curricular needs of the subject are effectively supported. Documentation, including the aims for the subject, is inadequate. There are no formal meetings to consider subject development and the development plan needs annual review and evaluation. There is currently no monitoring and evaluation of the impact of teaching on pupils' learning and standards of performance in external examinations. A regular programme of professional development so that the department can keep up to date with recent ideas and developments in the subject, and the opportunity to observe good practice elsewhere would be beneficial. Accommodation is in specialist rooms but not all provide a suitable learning environment. However, the adjacent learning resource centre is an excellent base for investigatory resource-based learning and is increasingly used. Resources are satisfactory, overall, but there are some serious shortfalls such as the need for an overhead projector and whiteboard, a video monitor and blackouts, standing display maps in each specialist room, and a fieldwork budget.

## **HISTORY**

157. Standards are broadly in line with national expectations for 14 and 16-year-olds. According to teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3, the percentage of pupils reaching level 5 and over has been below the national average for the last three years, but with an average proportion reaching level 6 and over. GCSE results in 1999 for grades A\*-C and A\*-G were above the national averages for all but fell somewhat in 2000. Overall, the trend has been one of improvement since the last inspection.

158. In comparison with similar schools and pupils' prior attainment, achievement is good in Years 7-9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. By the end of Year 7 pupils have a good understanding of time lines and know how to assess the reliability of evidence. The majority soon become caught up in the excitement of studying the past. By the end of Year 8 pupils can write good, extended explanations and are beginning to understand the feelings and ideas of people of other times. By the end of Year 9 they can compare and contrast features of two different ages and have a clear idea of the progression of events through the periods they have studied. Standards of writing and presentation are high. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress owing to the help they receive from their teachers. However, lower-attaining pupils in some groups lack understanding of the implications of events and some higher attaining pupils are not being given work that challenges them. Year 10 pupils have a good base of historical knowledge about early twentieth century history and they can write extended explanations and make accurate assessments of evidence. Year 11 pupils have a good understanding of the aftermath of the Second World War and the rise of Communism. They have done some creditable coursework studies of the rise of Stalin.
159. Literacy is well developed. However, pupils cannot usually speak confidently in discussions. Numeracy and ICT skills are rarely used at present in history lessons. However, many pupils use their computers to present their work, and access the Internet for research purposes.
160. Improvement has been satisfactory since the last inspection, including an improvement in GCSE results and Year 9 assessments. A concentration on the teaching of literacy has resulted in an improvement in the range and quality of writing. Management of pupils' behaviour has improved and no disruption of any kind was observed. Pupils' attitudes to the subject are good, with many obviously enjoying their history lessons. Resources have improved and there is now some adaptation of tasks for pupils of different ability but not in all classes. There have been visits to places of historical interest, including a journey to Auschwitz, but these are not at present fully integrated as learning experiences.
161. Teaching is good in Years 7-9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Pressure to raise examination standards sometimes means that teaching is more concerned with the accumulation of knowledge than with a deeper understanding, involving pupils thinking for themselves. Teaching was satisfactory or better in all lessons and in three was very good. The best teaching stimulated pupils to learn how to put themselves into the place of people in the past. Particularly noteworthy were Year 7 lessons introducing the Roman army by dwelling on their discipline and efficiency, and a Year 8 lesson impressing on pupils the horrors of the living conditions of factory workers during the Industrial Revolution. Teachers' good subject knowledge means that they can respond well to pupils' observations and questions. Relationships are good and there is a peaceful working environment. Assessment is a strength: marking is based on National Curriculum levels or examination grades and makes clear what can be done to improve the standard next time. Detailed records are kept of attainment and progress and these are used as a basis for modifying the teaching of different modules.
162. In some lessons the organisation of pupils for group or individual enquiry means that pupils of all abilities can work at their own pace and gain a sense of achievement. There is a proportion of teacher-dominated lessons which result in a slower rate of learning because pupils are not given the opportunity to pose questions and consider a response. In many lessons, detailed planning is weak: they have aims but no clear indication of how to achieve them, which leads to an uncertain pace of learning.
163. Management and leadership are satisfactory. Targets for improvement are a priority and progress has been made in monitoring teaching, but teaching styles are still uneven, which suggests that best practice is not being fully shared. The newly qualified teacher is well supported, relationships are positive and all staff are committed to improvement.



## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

164. Standards in ICT have been unsatisfactory in recent years, but are now improving and are now generally in line with national norms. The percentage of pupils gaining level 5 and above in the teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 was below the national average in 2000 and lower than in 1999. The performance of girls in 2000 was better than the boys'. Very few pupils achieved A\*-C grades in 1999 or 2000. The percentage of pupils gaining A\*-C grades in 2000 in business studies was, however, slightly above the national average.
165. In Years 7 and 8, many pupils have above average skills in ICT. Their use of the Internet and electronic mail is developing very strongly and they are confident and competent in the manipulation of text and graphics, techniques of data storage and retrieval, and the use of software. The newly acquired facilities for computer aided design and computer aided manufacture in the design and technology department will allow pupils to experience computer control technology at both key stages. Pupils' understanding of the impact of new technologies in social, economic, ethical and moral matters is relatively weak, as is the use of computers for measurement. Very many pupils are becoming confident with word processing and the use of databases and spreadsheet work is growing stronger. Some very good ICT work occurs in art and design, business studies, design and technology and religious studies. In other subjects, opportunities to use ICT are still restricted because of limited access to computers, but the school plans to improve this by equipping all departments. Some good computer-generated folios are being produced, for example in textiles, but is limited in other subjects. In business studies, Year 11 pupils demonstrate satisfactory use of mathematical skills to calculate the break-even point and cash flow of a business and are able to give good examples based on their individual visits to local industry. Overall, pupils' application and use of ICT and their ability to talk about the process are a delight to observe.
166. The specialist ICT lessons ensure that the quality of learning is good at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory at Key Stage 4. Very many pupils, particularly at Key Stage 3, are very confident in their use of the keyboard and when using the software programs. While pupils' acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding is satisfactory at Key Stage 4, the reasoning skills of many pupils are weak, and they are unsure about evaluating their own work and identifying targets for improvement. Very many pupils, particularly at Key Stage 3, demonstrate an impressive pace of working and work output. Pupils with special educational needs enjoy working with computers.
167. The overall quality of teaching in business studies and ICT lessons is good. Teachers make effective use of time and resources and they demonstrate very good knowledge of the subject. They encourage pupils to become independent and to support one another, and there is equal opportunity and access for all. Class management is often very good. Instructions are clear but lesson are sometimes too open-ended. Sometimes, pupils are not sufficiently informed about how their levels of skill relate to National Curriculum and examination requirements, nor how to improve. Teachers recognise that they need to challenge pupils to think more deeply about their work. Special educational needs pupils receive very good support from the teachers.
168. When using ICT, pupils demonstrate very positive attitudes towards their learning, particularly at Key Stage 3. They are motivated by the opportunity to take responsibility for organising and presenting their work. There is very good collaboration among pupils, who are keen to help each other. This is very evident when large numbers of pupils attend the Learning Resource Base to use the computers during the lunch periods.
169. The thrust towards improving ICT in the school is refreshing. An action plan has been prepared that clearly identifies what needs to be done. Teachers from different departments are attending in-service courses to improve their ICT skills and knowledge. The head of department is to revise the scheme of work and to carry out a further audit of the use of ICT across the school in order to meet changing ICT requirements and pupils' needs, and to ensure that all pupils, including the most able, are making suitable progress. All pupils at both key stages attend discrete ICT lessons. The network manager provides excellent service in managing the 116 networked computers and supporting the teaching staff and pupils. Documentation is very well organised in both ICT and business studies. Areas for further attention include monitoring opportunities to use ICT in various subjects, and assessing the development of skills in these contexts. Some issues

remain to be clarified in the new certificates for Year 11. The planned video-conferencing facility will provide interesting new opportunities.

170. Good progress has been made since the last inspection through the recent significant improvements in resources. A new on-line course has been introduced, accredited through GNVQ. Pupils' use of the Internet is impressive. However, some expectations of Year 11 pupils are still too low, and more time is needed for the improved equipment to lead to improved results.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

171. Good standards are reached in foreign languages. A high proportion of pupils were entered for French in 2000 and an above average percentage achieved A\*-C grades, higher than in the previous year. All pupils entering achieved a grade in the range A\*- G, with few pupils gaining less than grade E. The proportion gaining A\*-C grades in German was well above average, and significantly higher than in 1999. Results at A\*-G were in line with the national average. Pupils tended to achieve higher results in languages than in their other subjects. Girls obtained better results than boys, though the difference this year was significantly less than that found nationally.
172. A good foundation is laid at Key Stage 3. The current attainment of pupils in modern foreign languages at the end of Key Stage 3 is higher than nationally expected, and in line with their teachers' most recent assessments. Within a few weeks of starting to study their first foreign language, French or Spanish, all pupils, including those with special educational needs, can exchange everyday greetings and basic information about themselves, their families and their daily lives. They learn the phrases and vocabulary they need in class and can follow lessons conducted wholly or largely in the foreign languages. They can soon extract detail from simple texts and recorded statements. Higher attaining pupils and others requesting to do so study German in addition, making good progress by applying the skills acquired in Year 7. Many pupils are confident in conducting short dialogues on various topics such as shopping for food. By age 14 most pupils have acquired a useful insight into the use of tenses and other grammatical features and many sustain this interest into the following key stage.
173. The work of older pupils seen during the inspection was of good quality. Higher attaining pupils read authentic texts, listen with understanding to naturally spoken French and German and write in various styles including narrative and letters. Many express their thoughts clearly in speech and writing on topics such as the environment, although in a minority of lessons they have too few opportunities to speak at length. Lower attainers, including some pupils with special educational needs and those studying Spanish for an alternative certificate to GCSE, acquire the simple language they need for travelling and living abroad.
174. The quality of teaching is good, and sometimes very good or excellent. A combination of established good practice and the appointment of a lively and imaginative head of department and teachers have improved the presentation and effectiveness of many lessons. In a minority of lessons where teaching is too formal and based too heavily on exercises from textbooks and worksheets, some pupils lose interest and achieve less as a result.
175. Many lessons are conducted wholly or largely in the foreign language, accurately pitched at a challenging or an accessible level to suit the pupils' abilities. In a minority the excessive use of English mentioned in the last report persists, so pupils are insufficiently exposed to the language they are studying. Most lessons are well planned and balanced to exercise the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Many provide enjoyable practical applications of the language such as counting games, simulations of television programmes and surveys. In others, gifted and talented pupils work assiduously towards the high grades they expect to achieve. Teachers make and use interesting visual aids and materials, including wall charts to prompt responses and cards for pupils to manipulate. They adapt their teaching to include pupils with special educational needs and a small minority who speak English as an additional language. Most pupils are co-operative and appreciate opportunities to learn independently in pairs and groups. The use of ICT is unevenly developed owing to some teachers' lack of training and infrequent access to computers. Teachers appraise their pupils' attainment continuously, eliciting individual or choral responses in class, monitoring their paired work and analysing the results of regular assessments. They mark pupils' books and coursework regularly and thoroughly, adding useful

advice and supportive comments. They interpret data to predict and encourage future performance, reflected in rising standards, and particularly in boys' GCSE results.

176. The department is very well led and enjoys prominent status in the school. The teachers are hard working and co-operate to good effect with their assistants. The languages suite is designed to support learning through visual aids and displays of finished work. The development plan is relevant to the school's aims and represents priorities established through formal discussion. More frequent and widespread opportunities for direct contact with young people in Europe, though travel, work overseas or virtual links using the Internet would enrich the quality of pupils' learning.

## MUSIC

177. Standards of work at both key stages have improved since the last inspection because of effective teaching and learning. The majority of pupils in Key Stage 3 are achieving standards at the national average. Music was introduced into the Key Stage 4 curriculum in 1998 and the first examination candidates were entered this year. This development is an improvement on the last inspection. Forty-six per cent of the candidates gained A\*-C grades, which was below the national average. All candidates gained a grade in the A\*-G range. At present a total of 26 pupils are studying music in Key Stage 4, which is unusually high.
178. The quality of teaching and learning at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory, overall, with some good areas of development. Pupils are motivated to do well in most lessons because of enthusiastic teaching taking place. Year 7 pupils are taught to work imaginatively on basic medieval musical styles and they experiment with group improvisations using the Latin text 'Sanctus, sanctus, dominus, hosanna in excelsis'. Pupils in Year 8 are knowledgeable about the origins of folk song. They also strive to give a good keyboard performance of the Lieutenant Kije theme by Prokofiev. Year 9 pupils compare and contrast musical changes that occur with new releases of old songs. Others work on preparing a backing to a Christmas song based on the C, F and G chords.
179. Good teaching at Key Stage 4 helps to develop the latent musical talents of pupils who have limited practical skills. In Year 10 the emphasis is placed on improving pupils' rhythm and notation and basic skills of performing, composing and aural recognition. This aims to raise their quality of learning to that of pupils learning orchestral instruments. Year 11 pupils work on the development of music in the baroque era and use words such as *aria*, *recitative*, *basso continuo* and *figured bass* with understanding. They produce extended compositions in a variety of styles including lullabies and Irish jigs. Many have good technique and play instruments in a competent manner.
180. Teachers have good subject knowledge. This leads to very confident teaching that encourages most pupils to do well. Reinforcement takes place in lessons to remind pupils of what is being learned and time is left at the end for appraisal and summing up. In rare instances where planning is not secure, the pace of learning and progress is affected. Teaching is aimed at inclusiveness and this is shown by the commitment and enjoyment of the majority of pupils including those with special educational needs.
181. Expectations and attitudes to classroom music have come a long way since the last inspection. This is due to higher teacher expectations and greater pupil interest and involvement in music. Good listening skills are evident in many classes and pupils raise their hands to ask and answer questions. Practical work is done with pride. Good relationships exist between teachers and pupils. Unsatisfactory behaviour occurs when pupils do not have a clear understanding of the musical content of the topic being taught, as in one Year 8 lesson attempting folk dancing.
182. The department is well led and managed and reflects the school's aims and values. The scheme of work addresses the needs of the National Curriculum and examination requirements. However, there are two areas that need further attention. ICT is available in the music department but is not used to enhance the teaching and learning of pupils. Assessment is weak and is still not sufficient to give a clear picture of what individual pupils know and can do.

183. Problems with accommodation arise when more than one class is timetabled for music at the same time. As there is only one specialist room for music teaching, the second class must be taught elsewhere. No particular room is designated for this purpose. While resources in the music room are adequate, there are no resources in the various non-specialist rooms and this inhibits the development of practical skills.
184. There is great scope for the development of extra-curricular music. A regular pattern of concerts and shows would raise the standing of music in school and in the local community. Assemblies also present an opportunity for occasional musical contributions. The rearrangement of peripatetic teachers' timetables to the same day would allow large-scale rehearsals supported by the instrumental teachers, and would lead to a more corporate spirit.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

185. Standards in physical education are good. Fourteen-year-olds reach a standard which is well above national norms. They show interest, enthusiasm and a determination to succeed. There are very high standards in swimming. Girls and boys show a good technique in breast stroke, front crawl and back crawl. Only a very small minority of pupils are unable to swim a distance of 20 metres. In netball, girls show skills which are often quite advanced. Team games are fostered with enthusiasm and, even in sports which are new to them, such as rugby, pupils rapidly reach a satisfactory standard. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 perform a range of dance and gymnastic skills with good control and can introduce their own interpretations to their work. Pupils listen attentively to instructions and advice, understand them and can ask relevant questions associated with them.
186. By the age of 16, pupils have made further progress in swimming. Most girls and boys master a range of survival skills and can swim distances as far as 800 metres without a rest. Enthusiasm for team games is maintained, with netball and hockey for girls, basketball, soccer and rugby for boys, and mixed volleyball figuring prominently in the programme.
187. All the requirements of the National Curriculum are met. There is a wide range of extra-curricular pursuits, including team games. On any typical day there will be at least five sporting or physical activities on offer at lunchtime or after school. These activities are well supported by girls and boys in all year groups, a reflection of teachers' enthusiasm. School teams participate successfully in inter-school competitions and a number of pupils achieve town and county honours.
188. GCSE physical education is offered as an option in Years 10 and 11. About 30 per cent take it up with a boy to girl ratio of 3:2. 94 per cent of girls entered in 1998 achieved grades A\*-C, followed by 82 per cent in 1999 and 2000. This is exceptionally high. With a wider spread of ability in the entries, boys results for the corresponding years were 40, 35 and 50 per cent. The thought and effort being put into the improvement of boys' achievement are beginning to produce results. Many boys clearly have a very strong preference for the practical side of the course.
189. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated into the main programme and given appropriate encouragement. Staff are sensitive to individual difficulties, for example fear of water, and do all they can to offer encouragement. Pupils in general are very supportive of those with special needs. The small number of pupils from ethnic minority groups is well integrated in the main programme.
190. The quality of teaching ranges from good to excellent. The best lessons have a brisk pace with maximum pupil activity. Progress is made by gradual steps, clearly described and demonstrated. There is appropriate use of praise and encouragement. In a Year 9 netball lesson, girls progressed from basic passing and catching to quite advanced dodging and marking skills, in gradual steps, with clear, concise explanations being given during very brief pauses in practical activity. Teachers are enthusiastic and have a good knowledge of the subject. Lessons are thoroughly prepared, with clear objectives that are communicated to the pupils, giving them a clear idea of what is expected of them and how to achieve it. This maximises the probability of improved performance.

191. Class management is very good. The department has very clear rules and procedures which are implemented with scrupulous fairness, and pupils understand and accept them. This is a major factor in promoting the excellent attitudes and behaviour which are a feature of every lesson and provide an ideal learning environment. The staff show an interest in each individual pupil, giving realistic challenges to the most able, together with support and encouragement for the less able. In swimming lessons at both key stages, very talented pupils were given opportunities to use their ability in addition to assisting with the coaching of weaker performers. Tasks were modified to provide all pupils with a realistic challenge. Most lessons include good warm up and recovery sessions. The best lessons start with an explanation of lesson objectives, then a warm up, followed immediately by the body of the lesson. In a Year 8 gymnastics lesson, the teacher started with an explanation of the objectives, followed by a warm up, and continued with necessary explanations while the pupils were doing stretching exercises. The pupils were, then, fully prepared mentally and physically.
192. The department is very efficiently managed. Responsibilities are delegated where appropriate. All pupils are assessed regularly and comprehensive records are kept. These are used to monitor pupils' progress, to assess the effectiveness of teaching and to inform future planning. Additionally, staff keep a record of particular occurrences which may be of note in building pupil profiles. For example, one teacher recorded the pleasure experienced by a special needs pupil, normally lacking in confidence, when he scored for the first time in basketball. Pupils are encouraged to evaluate their own performances and those of partners, and consider what is needed to make further progress.
193. The school has extensive playing fields, an all-weather training area and an athletics track. They are adequately maintained, as are the gymnasium and fitness room. The swimming pool is particularly clean and well maintained. Changing accommodation for pupils is rather cramped and staff accommodation is inadequate. The tennis court has a surrounding fence which is badly in need of repair, while the courts themselves attract an unacceptable amount of litter. The area between the gymnasium and the tennis courts is untidy, unsightly and a potential safety hazard. Otherwise, the staff always insist on appropriate safety procedures.
194. The school has been awarded the prestigious Sportsmark Award in recognition of its good quality programme of physical education and sport. A successful and forward thinking department aims to extend this programme even further.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

195. Standards in religious education are satisfactory throughout the school, and there has been a strong improvement since the previous inspection. At Key Stage 3, the attainment of lower attaining pupils is higher than normally seen and teachers support them effectively through appropriately differentiated worksheets and vocabulary lists. Higher attaining pupils are limited by work that does not regularly provide challenge and extend them or give them opportunity to discuss in depth the implications for themselves of what they are learning. Pupils were observed to have good knowledge of figures such as Martin Luther King and Christina Maria Gomez and could relate it to the teachings of Jesus. The department's formal assessments at Key Stage 3 focus on the investigation of a religious approach to life, but many pupils also develop a personal response to religion.
196. In the GCSE examinations in 2000, nearly two thirds of Year 11 pupils were entered for the GCSE Short Course. Fifty-one per cent of those entered achieved A\*-C grades, which is commendable given the high numbers entered.
197. At Key Stage 3, most pupils make good progress. Very good work was observed, for example, when pupils wrote imaginary postcards to those imprisoned in Auschwitz, as part of a sequence of work on Shoah. Similarly, very good work was produced by lower attaining pupils, including those with a statement of special educational needs, when they were using imaginative drawings based on medieval paintings and bible texts to evaluate work on the Annunciation of Jesus. In their responses to the teachings of Jesus, pupils make good progress in understanding personal values and the extent to which Christian values can be reflected in the personal action and commitment of others. In their work on Amnesty International, pupils identified what they

considered were basic human rights and compared them with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. They were able to relate this to the personal commitment, belief and faith of figures such as Terry Waite and Rosa Parks.

198. At Key Stage 4, the development of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding is supported by well-prepared booklets produced by the teachers. In response to homework, teachers often model answers that indicate how better answers can be developed. These pupils develop the ability to write at length and to express their own opinions while taking into account their understanding of those with different views. In a Year 10 class, pupils responded with thought-provoking observations and challenged each other's views about modern day miracles and the miracles of Jesus.
199. Teaching is good throughout the school. In a quarter of lessons seen it was very good or excellent. Teachers are secure in their subject knowledge and demonstrate an interest and enthusiasm for the subject, which are communicated to pupils. Facts and concepts, such as those relating to the rituals associated with Muslim prayers, are communicated through well-produced worksheets, video clips, overhead transparencies and appropriate artefacts. The most effective lessons are characterised by good planning and pace during the lesson and by activities that encourage pupils to reflect on the significance for themselves of what they have learned. Questions probe understanding and encourage discussion. A lesson on spiritual development made good use of 'guided imagery' in which pupils closed their eyes and were guided by the teacher on a journey through an imaginary field to a high wall with a large, closed gate. Pupils responded sensitively and thoughtfully to questions about how they felt as they walked through the grass and how, as a flower, they felt at being picked and discarded. In a Year 9 class, a video clip was shown of Oscar Romero that left the class silent and thoughtful. The teacher was sensitive to the response of the pupils and allowed time before breaking the silence.
200. Sometimes the aims of lessons are not communicated clearly to the pupils and teachers do not check the levels of learning and progress at the end of the lesson. These weaker lessons are characterised by too great an emphasis on the content of workbooks, copying text from the board and answering questions that do not sufficiently probe pupils' understanding or challenge their opinions and assumptions.
201. The department provides a range of thoughtful and thought provoking experiences for pupils that match their abilities and interests and meet the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. More opportunities could be provided for pupils to discuss and reflect on what they learn about themselves and others from the religions they study. In both key stages, pupils are encouraged to listen and to read but there are limited opportunities to undertake extended writing, take part in in-depth discussions or to take responsibility for their own learning. Where these opportunities occur, such as in a Year 7 project based on the Muslim Hajj, pupils respond purposefully and with enthusiasm.
202. The needs of lower attaining pupils and those with a statement of special educational needs are catered for by appropriately differentiated work that is supported if necessary by vocabulary lists and writing frames. A Year 7 class undertaking project work on the Hajj had separate support materials for both lower and higher attaining pupils related to their different needs. In this lesson, all pupils were provided with challenging work and were able to progress at an appropriate level.
203. Since the last inspection the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus have been met but the time allocated to religious education at Key Stage 4 is only just adequate to meet the demands of the agreed syllabus and the GCSE Short Course. At Key Stage 3, the time allocated to religious education remains adequate.
204. This is a good department that is well managed and led by an enthusiastic and well-qualified teacher. Schemes of work are thorough and cover the requirements of the agreed syllabus. Classrooms are well equipped with TV, video and OHP, and one room has a computer. Worksheets and workbooks produced by the teachers are of a high standard and teachers make good use of a limited but effective range of artefacts. Wall displays of pupils' work and posters related to the work being studied in each year group are of a high standard. There are sets of dictionaries in both specialist rooms, which pupils are encouraged to use.

