

INSPECTION REPORT

TARPORLEY COMMUNITY HIGH SCHOOL

Tarporley

LEA area: Cheshire

Unique reference number: 111416

Headteacher: Mr A Sieber

Reporting inspector: Dr A R Beaver
20224

Dates of inspection: 20 – 23 November 2000

Inspection number: 223785

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 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Eaton Road Tarporley Cheshire
Postcode:	CW6 0BL
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Dr C Shaw
Date of previous inspection:	6 – 10 November 1995

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Tarporley Community High School is located in the large village of Tarporley, Cheshire. It is comprehensive, and of average size for a secondary school. It provides education for 977 boys and girls aged 11 to 18. Pupils come from primary schools in Tarporley and surrounding villages. The school is popular and has increased in size by almost one pupil in five during the last five years. The sixth form comprises 137 students who all follow advanced courses. The percentage of pupils identified by the school to have special educational needs is below average, and the proportion with statements of special need is well below average. Almost all pupils speak English as their first language and are of European origin. The proportion of pupils who claim eligibility for free school meals is well below average. Statistical evidence indicates that the area from which the school draws its pupils is relatively advantaged. There is very little deprivation in the area from which the school draws its pupils. On entry to the school at age 11, pupils' attainment spans the full range of ability and is broadly average overall. The requirement for entry to advanced courses in the sixth form is five or more GCSE A* to C grades.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Tarporley Community High School is a very good school. Its pupils and sixth form students regularly attain standards that are well above average. Teaching is good and much is very good. Principled, diligent and effective leadership contributes very well to the school's success in maintaining good standards of learning and teaching. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Most teaching is good, and much is very good in enabling pupils to form very good relationships, behave well, make very good progress and attain well above average standards of work.
- Principled, diligent and effective leadership of very good quality uses teamwork well in developing school priorities and in maintaining consistently good standards of teaching and learning.
- The school aims to promote well-established, carefully considered values and provides very well for pupils' moral, social and cultural development.
- The quality of care, guidance and support provided for pupils and students is very good, and enables them to achieve their best.
- Sixth form students attain very high standards and have exceptionally mature attitudes to school and to work.
- Links with parents and partner primary schools are well developed and reflected in some very good provision for extra-curricular activities.

What could be improved

- Standards of attainment and accommodation in art.
- A whole-school approach to literacy, including consistency in marking and presentation of pupils' work in Years 7, 8 and 9, and ensuring that work is well adapted for pupils of all levels of attainment in literacy.
- Provision for the statutory entitlement of some Year 10 and 11 pupils to measure, record, control and automate events, by use of information and communication technology, and further assessment of pupils' use of information and communication technology across the curriculum.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has much improved since its last inspection in November 1995 under very good leadership. Standards in national tests in Year 9 and at GCSE have been regularly well above average, and usually above the average of schools of similar type. In 2000, a year group of overall lower attainment on entry to the school than in the previous two years gained a result in line with that of similar schools, but met the targets agreed with the local authority. A level results have improved considerably and have been maintained at an exceptionally high level. The quality of teaching is good, and much is very good. Overall, the school has made good progress in resolving the key issues of the previous inspection. The difference between the overall attainment of boys and girls is now no greater than the national difference and now, for example, much less than this in the average points gained at GCSE in 2000. In general, teachers use homework effectively to extend pupils' learning. However, standards of marking and the presentation required of pupils' work are still too varied in quality. Information and communication technology is used with increasing effect to extend learning, but not all pupils in Years 10 and 11 receive their full entitlement to the subject. Religious education is now provided in Year 13. Risk assessment is carried out regularly. The school is achieving well and has good capacity to continue to improve even further.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with			
	all schools			similar schools+
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	C
A-levels/AS-levels	A*	A	A*	

Key

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

+Reference to similar schools is to those schools which contain a similar proportion of pupils who claim eligibility for free school meals. This is considered to be a valid indicator by which to compare schools with pupils of similar backgrounds. No national comparisons are made with similar schools at A level. Reference to all schools indicates all secondary schools across the country.

On entry to the school at age 11, pupils' levels of attainment are broadly average, overall. They make very good progress in Years 7, 8 and 9 to attain well above average standards in national tests at the end of Year 9. In comparison with all schools and with similar schools, they attain equally well in the three subjects tested, English, mathematics and science. The trend in results attained in these tests has risen in line with the improving national trend.

During Years 10 and 11, pupils continue to progress well and usually attain standards at GCSE that are well above average. In 2000, a year group of overall lower attainment on entry to the school than in the previous two years gained a result in line with that of similar schools, and met the targets agreed with the local authority. In 1999, the result was above the average of similar schools. Since 1995, the trend in pupils' average GCSE point score has risen above the national upward trend. Pupils attain very well in most subjects at GCSE, but some do not attain as well as they should in art or German.

In the sixth form, students attain very highly. Results at A level have regularly been within the top five per cent of all schools nationally.

In work seen, pupils attain well above average standards. In English, they speak confidently, read aloud with good expression and write effectively, if not always accurately, in a range of styles. They show much mental agility in successfully extending their knowledge and skills in mathematics. In science, pupils' practical work is of unusually high quality. Overall, pupils of all levels of ability achieve the very good standards that their prior attainment indicates that they should in lessons.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Most pupils have a lively interest in their work and very positive attitudes to school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Most pupils behave very well in class, and although some are boisterous, they are generally well behaved when they are not in classrooms.
Personal development and relationships	Very good overall. Sixth form students have exceptionally mature and responsible attitudes to work and to school. Relationships are very good among pupils and between most pupils and teachers.
Attendance	Very good. Attendance is well above average; unauthorised absence is well below average.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching was satisfactory or better in 97 per cent of lessons, and in 72 per cent, it was good or better. Thirty five per cent of teaching was very good or excellent, with 7 per cent of lessons of this highest quality. Two lessons were unsatisfactory because pupils were not sufficiently challenged to extend their learning. Teaching is predominantly good, including that of English, mathematics and science. In most subjects there is some very good teaching. Some excellent teaching was seen in design and technology, drama, history and science. In art, pupils need more guidance to structure their work and, in German, boys in particular are not always required to speak enough in the foreign language to gain greater confidence and skill. In most subjects, teachers enable pupils to use their initiative well to extend their learning by challenging them to be active participants in lessons. They manage pupils very well because relationships are very good. The teaching of literacy is satisfactory, but progress could be faster in improving spelling, punctuation, grammar and handwriting in Years 7, 8 and 9. Written work could be further adapted for pupils of all levels of attainment, and marked to a consistently high standard. Numeracy is well taught. Overall, teaching meets pupils' needs well, enabling them to extend their knowledge and understanding successfully.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good range of provision for all age groups. The humanities course in Years 7 and 8 provides a good learning opportunity, but too many teachers sharing the teaching of the same classes reduce the benefit. A whole-school policy is needed to direct good practice in literacy, especially in Years 7, 8 and 9. Some pupils' statutory entitlement to information and communication technology is lacking. The new vocational course in Year 11 is a very good innovation. The range of courses in mathematics in the sixth form is particularly impressive.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Almost all pupils gain a good range of qualifications at age 16.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. Pupils achieve very well.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good overall. Provision for pupils' moral and social development is a school priority and very well achieved. Cultural development is well provided for. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. A daily act of collective worship is not provided for all pupils.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good. Pupils are very well supported to achieve their personal and intellectual best.

Some pupils in Years 10 and 11 do not receive their statutory entitlement to measure, record, control and automate events by use of information and communication technology. Good provision is made for extra-curricular activities, with some exciting opportunities available.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. Principled, diligent and effective leadership ensures that pupils achieve the standards, overall, of which they are capable, and that the quality of learning is a school priority shared by all.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. Governors are interested and committed to the success of the school. They have a good range of professional expertise which they use freely in its interest. They work closely with the headteacher and staff in deciding priorities for development. Governors do not fully meet statutory requirements for collective worship, or for one strand of information and communication technology in Years 10 and 11 for some pupils.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school consults with parents, pupils and staff to judge its performance, and uses data effectively to evaluate the quality of what it achieves and provides.
The strategic use of resources	Good. Funding is used effectively to provide pupils with good opportunities to extend their learning. A full audit of accounts is overdue.

Pupils' learning in art is constrained by the quality of accommodation. The school applies the principles of best value well. Its results compare well with other schools and it provides good challenge through the range of its curriculum. It consults well with parents and pupils and ensures effective competition for its services.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils are expected to work hard and achieve their best. • Their children make good progress. • Teaching is good. • Their children like attending the school. • The school is helping their children to be mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school working more closely with them. • More information on how their children are getting on. • Homework.

The inspection team agrees with parents' positive views. The school works as closely as is reasonable in involving parents and seeking their views. For example, surveys of opinion of those with children in Years 7 and 10 are regularly conducted. Governors and the leadership team consider these views carefully and take action where possible. Regular reports are issued and consultation evenings with teachers for parents and their children take place. However, parents are very interested and committed to supporting their children's progress, and some want more opportunity to consult with staff. Overall, the school gives good access to parents and provides a good quality of information on progress. Homework is set regularly and is generally used well by teachers to extend learning. However, guidance on coursework for GCSE should be more detailed and structured in art.

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Most teaching is good, and much is very good in enabling pupils to form very good relationships, behave well, make very good progress and attain well above average standards of work.

1. The quality of teaching is a strength of the school. Most teaching is at least good, and one lesson in three is very good or better. Some teaching of excellent quality was seen in design and technology, drama, history and science. Teachers are very skilled at helping pupils to use their initiative in lessons. They enable pupils in many lessons to participate actively, think for themselves and advance their learning well to achieve higher standards. For example, in a very good Year 8 history lesson on industrial change, the teacher made pupils responsible for consolidating prior work to extend their understanding, by requiring them to clarify the meanings of key words related to the topic. They used hand-held whiteboards to develop word-associations with a partner very well. The lesson further enabled pupils to speak to the whole class, showing understanding of the historical context in a most confident, articulate manner. Pupils were successfully helped to achieve standards in the subject above those expected at this age.

2. Teachers make work challenging for pupils to help them to extend their learning successfully and make good progress. For example, the teacher of a very good Year 11 business studies lesson on sources of finance challenged pupils to think through the issues involved. Pupils' learning was well reinforced by the use of a good-quality handout and of computers, enabling them to extend their knowledge and understanding very well. The teacher of an excellent Year 10 practical lesson on reaction to displacement in science had high expectations of pupils, who responded very well in managing equipment and predicting and testing results successfully. The teacher ensured pupils' safety, enabling them to conduct the experiment with exemplary care and efficiency. Pupils gained greatly from the challenging experience provided, and much advanced their learning of the subject. Teachers made a Year 7 lesson in physical education very challenging, by providing an extensive and effective range of activities to develop levels of pupils' fitness, despite use of temporary accommodation for the subject. Pupils of all levels of skill in the subject were helped to participate, and they responded very well with great vigour and enthusiasm.

3. Teachers use their subject knowledge very well to enthuse pupils and develop their understanding of the subject. In a Year 10 lesson involving the design of a package for fast-food, for example, the teacher's high levels of practical skill and subject expertise enabled pupils of wide-ranging levels of attainment to enhance their own skills and knowledge of the subject, and to use initiative in applying techniques and equipment successfully. Similarly, teachers of modern foreign languages speak the language competently, enabling pupils to develop listening skills and confidence in its use themselves. Teachers have good understanding of the demands of the examination courses which pupils follow and help pupils to understand priorities in assessment so as to achieve well. For example, the teacher of a very good geography lesson used her own subject knowledge, and clear understanding of the requirements of the A level syllabus, to introduce requirements for a new module of work on global change to Year 13 students. Students quickly learned what was required for them to achieve highly in the new work.

4. A good range of methods is used to enable teachers to extend pupils' understanding. Teachers use questions well to test pupils' knowledge, for example in linking current work with prior work or homework, helping to clarify any misunderstanding. Questioning leads to

valuable discussion in many lessons, where teachers draw ideas from pupils to extend their learning. They give clear explanations and respond helpfully to pupils' questions. Practical work is well managed, for example in design and technology, physical education and science, where teachers have the skill and confidence to demonstrate techniques effectively to encourage and assist pupils' learning. Teachers generally adapt work well for lower attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs. For example, in a very good Year 11 French lesson for lower attaining pupils, the teacher's clear explanations, presentation and good choice of the pace of work helped pupils to achieve their best. However, work involving literacy skills is sometimes not fully adapted for lower attainers.

5. Teachers plan lessons very well. The one-hour periods are fully used; they begin and end punctually. Lessons mostly follow a well-judged sequence of related activities, extending pupils' knowledge and understanding of the subject well. For example, the teacher's clear objectives, in a Year 9 English lesson on Orwell's *Animal Farm*, were very well planned and linked to the requirements of the National Curriculum. The variety of activities planned by the teacher enabled the lesson to run at a brisk pace and helped pupils to develop their oral and written skills very well. The very good planning of a Year 11 history lesson on the Elizabethan theatre enabled pupils to learn successfully from the teacher's sequence of oral and written work. This enabled them to understand the conflicting views held at the time and to write persuasively of the moral, social and cultural reactions to the theatre.

6. Homework is used effectively to extend pupils' learning. In many lessons, teachers use the homework that pupils present to link with new learning planned for that lesson. In music, for example, teachers pool pupils' research from homework to help all to extend their knowledge of the social and political aspects of an era, in preparation for their musical studies of that period. They use pupils' chordal sequences prepared as homework, helping them to understand how to vary and enhance their compositions. In all subjects, teachers require pupils to use their planners to record work which is set to be done at home.

7. Positive relationships are apparent between teachers and pupils in the vast majority of lessons. Very good rapport enables teachers to manage their classes well. Teachers interest pupils in their work and, in many lessons, they share a common interest in the subject which enables them to build positive relationships. In an excellent Year 13 design and technology lesson on communications, for example, the teacher guided students very well as a friendly critic, helping them to extend their learning for themselves. Students had confidence to approach the teacher as a consultant to support their work, creating a learning environment of high quality, and enabling them to excel. Very good relationships help teachers to manage pupils and, in some cases, enthuse them. For example, shared enthusiasm for the subject and charismatic teaching in music enabled pupils in Year 10 to compose and gain good theoretical knowledge of the subject; in other classes, very good relationships enable music teachers to manage pupils well, despite the high levels of noise arising from the playing of keyboards. A Year 7 drama lesson, in which pupils performed improvisations in pairs, was managed successfully by the teacher who was able to overcome pupils' reticence and embarrassment because relationships gave them confidence to explore the roles which they took.

8. Overall, pupils behave very well in lessons, have very positive attitudes and want to learn because they respect and respond well to teachers. Pupils arrive promptly for lessons and quickly prepare themselves for work. In many lessons, they behave in an exemplary manner and enjoy their work. The occasions are rare when pupils are uncooperative and do not take full opportunity to learn. Pupils' behaviour is sometimes lively and boisterous out of lessons when they are less directly supervised, but teachers and other staff are vigilant in supervising pupils at break, lunchtime and on arrival and departure from the school.

9. It is the good quality of teaching, with many lessons of very good or higher quality, which enables pupils to make very good progress and achieve well above average standards in their work. Pupils' attainment, measured by Cognitive Ability Tests following their entry to the school, is broadly average. However, they make very good progress during Years 7, 8 and 9 to attain standards which are well above average in the national tests at the end of Year 9 in English, mathematics and science, in comparison with all schools and those of similar type (those containing a similar proportion of pupils who take up their entitlement to free school meals). Good teaching continues to ensure that pupils make very good progress in Years 10 and 11 to attain GCSE results which are regularly well above the average of all schools and, usually, above the average of similar schools. Only in art have pupils attained standards well below those which they attain in their other subjects at GCSE. Overall, the trend in pupils' average point score at GCSE has risen above the upward national trend since 1995. Students who continue into the sixth form attain very high standards, and results at A level are regularly among the top five per cent of all schools.

Principled, diligent and effective leadership of very good quality uses teamwork well in developing school priorities and in maintaining consistently good standards of teaching and learning.

10. The headteacher and senior staff provide principled, diligent and effective leadership. With the support and participation of governors and staff, they have clarified and renewed the school's vision of its central purposes. These include strong emphasis on the moral and social responsibility of the individual, a quality that is apparent in the values which the school upholds in its day-to-day life. Morning assemblies and thoughtful statements delivered in tutor groups, for example, reflect the high level of moral and social responsibility expected of the good citizen in contemporary society. The headteacher and leadership team lead by example, expecting and upholding high standards. Their expectations of what staff and pupils should achieve, personally and intellectually, are high and, for example, pupils' standards of attainment have risen since the previous inspection in 1995. The targets that are set for the school to achieve, in GCSE examinations for example, are accurate and carefully estimated by an effective system devised in-house, using the relevant accumulated data available. Members of the leadership team have a high profile around the school and hold the respect of governors, staff and pupils. They have strong commitment to ensuring the continued success of the school and, with senior staff, give time freely for reflection, planning and evaluation of priorities in extended conferences to determine how to take the school forward to further success.

11. School development planning is very good. The central issue for the school's development for the last three years has been to improve the quality of pupils' learning. There is no complacency in this school, although standards have regularly been good. The headteacher and leadership team rightly recognise the central importance of learning, and have the support of all staff in seeking methods to extend its quality from thoughtful reconsideration of how this may be achieved. Analysis of how pupils learn, with resulting good practice in teaching and learning throughout the school, enables most pupils to achieve their personal best. The school development plan makes clear the responsibility for the

achievement of agreed targets for each subject and year group. Time-scales and resources are clearly defined. Methods of evaluation to judge progress towards targets are explicit. Planning is effective, above all, in enabling all members of the school to work well together to achieve an improved quality of education for all pupils.

12. The leadership team works in close partnership with faculties in systematically evaluating the quality of education that each subject provides. A focus for review is agreed, and members of the leadership team, with staff from the faculty, undertake investigation of the standards achieved. Methods of review involve observation of teaching and learning in classrooms, scrutiny of pupils' work and discussion with pupils to understand their views. Findings arising from reviews are discussed with the faculty and, where appropriate, good practice is shared with all teachers. The process of monitoring and evaluation contributes to the good standards of teaching and learning generally achieved across the school. Of the two GCSE subjects in which pupils attain standards below and, in art, well below those that they gain in their other subjects, there is good evidence from observation of current provision that standards in German in Years 10 and 11 are improving, and the situation should lead to improved levels of attainment in examinations in due course. However, prospects of early improvement in art are less secure. Nevertheless, the leadership team is very effective, overall, in ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning is at least good, and often high.

The school aims to promote well-established, carefully considered values and provides very well for pupils' moral, social and cultural development.

13. The school has reflected carefully on the essential values it wants pupils to learn. After much careful consideration, governors and staff have recently renewed the statement of the school's key purposes. Moral and social priorities for life in school and in contemporary society are central to the life and work of the school, and parents largely agree that the school is helping their children to become mature and responsible. Relationships among pupils and staff are based on mutual respect. Pupils know right from wrong, and teachers deal with pupils fairly. Moral and ethical issues are considered in personal and social education courses and other lessons, providing good opportunity for pupils to reflect on significant moral and social issues, for example abortion and euthanasia. The drafting of the school's code of conduct engaged pupils themselves, enabling them to realise that they have responsibility to behave in a proper way towards each other. Each pupil's planner contains a clear set of rules and expectations of good behaviour, and requires respect for others. The school council and year councils are chaired by elected pupils, enabling them to share responsibility for the day-to-day life and well-being of all who work in the school. The school's published vision-statement aims to make pupils realise that they can make a difference for the better in society. Much effort is given to fund-raising for a range of charities, some of which support people who suffer deprivation in other countries.

14. Pupils' social and cultural development is very well provided for. Relationships among pupils and between pupils and teachers are, overall, very good. Pupils receive consistent guidance on the importance of personal relationships and respect for others. Many opportunities are provided for pupils to learn together beyond the classroom, for example, in activities week and from a range of residential experiences. Many activities provide rich opportunity for cultural development, as in music and drama. Pupils respond well by showing responsibility for the school community, for example by helping at open evenings, participating in the Christmas Fair and helping in school productions.

The quality of care, guidance and support provided for pupils and students is very good, and enables them to achieve their best.

15. Pupils are very well cared for and guided and supported to achieve their best. Teachers know pupils very well, and relationships are very positive in the vast majority of lessons, giving pupils confidence to discuss difficulties with work. The personal and social education programme is carefully considered and well managed. It takes full account of the needs of pupils as they mature. Tutors have responsibility for the individuals in their tutor groups throughout their compulsory school years, enabling them to know each person well. Pupils who experience particular difficulties are assigned to individual senior members of staff for additional guidance and support. Attendance and punctuality are very good and the school works hard to implement its procedures to ensure these are maintained at a high level. Health and safety considerations are given proper attention, and child protection is in line with local procedures. Staff are well aware of how to act in the event of any concern for a pupil's well-being. The school nurse provides helpful guidance and support on matters concerning pupils' emotional and physical well-being.

16. A well-organised programme of careers education and guidance is provided, particularly from Year 10 upwards. Pupils and sixth form students receive good quality information and support from staff and from the careers advisory service. Very good collections of careers literature and software are available in the library and in the sixth form centre for pupils' and students' use. Lessons and information evenings, for example on sixth form opportunities, are much appreciated by students and parents. The experience of how to manage an interview, with practice from trial interviews with local managers, is greatly appreciated by sixth form students.

17. A particularly strong feature of the care provided for pupils and sixth form students is the mentoring programme. Pupils and students are provided with regular opportunity to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses in learning, and to set individual targets, agreed with their tutors, upon which to focus improvement. Each pupil and student is seen and treated individually in partnership with the tutor and each tutor seeks to find ways to meet individual needs. The programme has run for four years and the improving levels of attainment in national tests in Year 9 and at GCSE and A level during this time indicates significant benefit to all. Parents are kept informed of how well their children are doing. The school makes very good use of the performance-data available to assess anticipated levels of attainment to inform the guidance provided in the mentoring programme. Pupils and students following examination courses are very well aware of the standards that they are achieving, and what they need to do to achieve their best.

Sixth form students attain very high standards and have exceptionally mature attitudes to school and to work.

18. Standards of attainment gained by sixth form students in A level and advanced vocational examinations are consistently very high. Since 1995, students' average point score has been regularly well above the national average and, in most years, well within the top five per cent of all schools. In 2000, sixth form students taking two or more A level subjects attained the highest average point score ever gained in the school. Results were higher than any other maintained school in the local authority, and well in line with those of local selective independent schools. Students' attainment of grades A and B in the A level examination was very high.

19. Sixth form students have remarkably mature attitudes to school and to work. Their attitudes in lessons are impressive. Their conduct is exemplary. For example, students in a

Year 13 class working on individual programmes in A level mathematics concentrated intensely on their own mathematical problem-solving, consulting the teacher when necessary, and attained high standards. They all made rapid progress and much enjoyed the challenge of their work. Similarly, students in a Year 13 A level geography class studying ecosystems worked effectively, using initiative in the tasks which the teacher had prepared very well. Students were highly motivated with very mature attitudes. In sixth form lessons in general, there is a meeting of minds between teachers and students. They share knowledge and develop understanding of the subject to a high level. Lessons are impressive opportunities for learning, and students take every advantage to extend their knowledge, skills and understanding.

20. Students have very responsible attitudes to school and to society. They are active as members of the pupils' and students' charity council, contributing to fund-raising for the charities which they select. Students contribute actively to community service both in school and outside. They work with parents of the High School Association to raise funds to improve opportunities for all pupils and students in the school. Their mature and responsible attitudes ensure that they use the time which is not timetabled for lessons sensibly. They have good habits of private study and use opportunities well for individual work in the pleasant environment of the library.

Links with parents and partner primary schools are well developed and reflected in some very good provision for extra-curricular activities.

21. The school maintains good links with parents, the vast majority of whom have confidence in its provision. Parents are confident that their children are expected to work hard and make progress to achieve good standards of work. The vast majority of parents believe that their children like attending the school. They believe that the school promotes the right values to help their children to grow into mature and responsible adults. The school seeks the views of parents, for example through questionnaires for parents of pupils in Years 7 and 10, reports their views in regular newsletters and, where possible, acts on concerns after due consideration. It supplies good quality information on pupils' progress in annual and interim reports, which indicate useful targets for pupils to aim for in order to improve their standard of work. Consultative evenings for parents, pupils and teachers provide further information on progress. The concerns of some parents, who say that they want the school to work even more closely with them, to have even more information on progress and for their children to have more homework, indicate the intense interest and commitment felt by concerned parents for the success of their children's education. This determination among parents that their children should succeed is a great benefit to the school, and most pupils have the support of very interested parents in successfully taking up the many worthwhile educational opportunities provided.

22. The school receives pupils aged eleven from nine main primary schools spread across a wide geographical area, but strong links are in place with these partner institutions. Transfer of pupils is very well managed with details of each pupil provided by primary schools and used effectively by the school in placing pupils into subject classes and tutor groups. Pupils who are identified with special educational needs are provided with specific help to ease their transfer between schools. A four-day residential experience at Bangor for all new pupils is particularly successful in enabling them to meet with others and with teachers to build helpful and constructive relationships at an early stage. Pupils and parents recognise the considerable benefits of this induction process to ensure that smooth transition is achieved. Other induction arrangements involve a day spent at the school to enable new pupils to gain experience at first-hand. Parents are closely involved. Subject links with primary schools are good in many areas. For example, pupils who are talented in mathematics are identified prior to transfer so that the department can respond to their

needs. Some primary school pupils have gained from links in a range of subjects, for example in science, geography and information and communication technology. The head of the English department has visited primary schools to observe lessons in literacy to establish how literacy skills can be further developed at transfer, a current priority for the school.

23. The school provides pupils with a good range of extra-curricular activities. Although most pupils live a considerable distance from the school, they are able to take advantage of some exciting opportunities because of the commitment and interest of teachers and the support of parents. For example, the school's extra-curricular go-karting is impressive. Pupils, parents and teachers share the experience. Enthusiasm is enormous from all participants - including some girls and mothers. Evening meetings give pupils excellent insight into auto-engineering and maintenance, with guidance from teachers and parents. Pupils race the vehicles at weekend meetings. The school team is the largest in the country and winner of the national championships. School drama is very strong, and regular imaginative productions involve considerable numbers of pupils, as in the innovative, promenade-production of *Romeo and Juliet*. Music contributes very well to pupils' enjoyment and experience of the subject, for example with a very popular swing band and instrumental groups, all well supported by interested peripatetic teachers. A very good range of competitive sports and games is provided for pupils, some of whom have recently travelled abroad to play soccer on a tour led and organised by teachers. Dance is a well-established extra-curricular activity. Teachers provide many visits and residential experiences, including some abroad. These activities are much appreciated by pupils and fully supported by parents.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Standards of attainment and accommodation in art.

24. Standards in art are not as high as they should be. Pupils attain standards in art at GCSE consistently below the national average and below the standards that they attain in the other subject examinations for which they enter. In recent years, pupils have attained well over one grade lower in GCSE art than they should, from comparison with their other results. Boys in particular underachieve. Pupils following the subject in Years 10 and 11 do not receive sufficient direction and guidance from teachers to enable them to manage their projects for examination well enough for them to achieve their potential. Time-plans to help pupils to schedule the completion of sections of work to regular deadlines as they work towards the final outcome of their projects are not used enough. Teachers provide individual guidance and constantly remind pupils to meet the final deadline, but do not help them to organise and manage the extended tasks well enough. As a result, teachers are not using their own knowledge and skills sufficiently, nor teaching and demonstrating these enough to groups of pupils progressively through extended projects. The department recognises this as a weakness and has devised an action plan to address the problem; however, there is little evidence yet of change of practice. The presentation of project-tasks on paper, provided to guide pupils' GCSE work, is poor and uninspiring, and teachers' use of information and communication technology is insufficient. Presentation of tasks is not made sufficiently challenging and inviting to fire pupils' imaginations. However, there is a display of good work in the department and around the school and some good use of information and communication technology by a few individual GCSE pupils.

25. The subject scheme of work similarly lacks structured direction to guide pupils' work in projects in Years 7, 8 and 9. No end products are specified. The head of department recognises the need to reorganise the scheme of work at Key Stage 3 in anticipation of a changed approach in Years 10 and 11.

26. The A level timetable for art does not stipulate that all students attend all lessons together. Few lessons are shared by all students. Students have been allowed this flexibility to enable them to combine subjects of their choosing. However, students of A level art lack sufficient opportunity to meet with others who are following their course, and so lose the chance to learn from others' ideas and experimentation, an important part of learning for this age-group. The opportunity for teachers to demonstrate skills and techniques to the full group of A level students to extend their knowledge and understanding is insufficient, because students are not timetabled together enough.

27. Classroom accommodation for art requires improvement. Accommodation is largely in four open-plan classrooms. Teaching is made very difficult by the level of noise that passes between rooms which lack floor-to-ceiling walls and doors. Teachers have control of their classes and pupils behave appropriately in lessons, but inevitable noise arising from movement of pupils in practical lessons and teachers' instructions to pupils is unhelpful to teaching and learning. Teachers have positioned large cupboards to separate the classrooms from each other, and the impression is one of untidiness, uninspiring to pupils pursuing a subject which should be, above all, aesthetically and visually stimulating. Some good three-dimensional work in card and paper is displayed, but the lack of facilities for ceramics restricts the range of media.

A whole-school approach to literacy, including consistency in marking and presentation of pupils' work in Years 7, 8 and 9, and ensuring that work is well adapted for pupils of all levels of attainment in literacy.

28. The school recognises the need to extend the co-ordination of teaching and learning of literacy further. A group of teachers has the task of planning a revised approach across the school. Many subject departments' planning identifies aspects of literacy for further development, and some are introducing key words and methods to help pupils to structure their writing. However, there is no whole-school policy for literacy that guides practice across the school. The head of English has visited primary schools to observe the teaching of literacy there, so that practice in the school can ensure good continuity in pupils' learning.

29. Overall, pupils achieve good standards of literacy, but some pupils' writing is of a lower standard than their other literacy skills. Pupils' oral skills are generally impressive. They are fluent, confident and clear speakers at all ages. They are competent and interested readers who read widely, supported by the very good choice of books available from the library, an impressive resource. Pupils develop good analytical skills from reading, and awareness of how to express themselves orally and in writing. They develop a good personal response to what they read. Pupils write effectively in a range of styles. However, even among higher attainers across Years 7 to 11, there are weaknesses with spelling, punctuation and presentation of written work.

30. The lack of an agreed policy, which stipulates practice across the school for the marking and presentation of written work, results in some pupils making slower progress and achieving lower standards in the technical aspects of writing and presentation of work than they might. Pupils' written work in science, for example, is not always marked well enough to advise pupils on how to improve their accuracy or presentation. In some humanities lessons in Years 7 and 8, mistakes with the layout of formal letters are not always corrected, and pupils seldom correct their work. Teachers allow some work to be re-drafted without correction of mistakes made in the original. Non-specialist English teachers miss some opportunities in humanities lessons to develop pupils' writing. For example, pupils directed to write a sixteenth century priest's diary were not reminded about key words or to write in the first person. Some classes do not have a specialist English teacher in Years 7 and 8, with the result that the teaching of English and literacy in humanities lessons is not always closely monitored. Teachers in the English department either have major responsibilities, or are newly qualified and, as a consequence, no teacher has yet been identified to support the training of non-specialist teachers in the teaching of literacy across the curriculum.

31. Although much work is well adapted for pupils' different levels of attainment across the curriculum, some is not sufficiently sensitive to the needs of some pupils, and should be further adapted to take account of the standards of literacy of some individuals in Years 7, 8 and 9, for example in the reading levels required in some textbooks.

Provision for the statutory entitlement of some Year 10 and 11 pupils to measure, record, control and automate events, by use of information and communication technology, and further assessment of pupils' use of the subject across the curriculum.

32. Some pupils do not receive their statutory entitlement to measure, record, control and automate events in information technology in Years 10 and 11. The combination of subjects that some choose to study for GCSE does not enable them to use this required strand of information and communication technology. Increasingly effective use has been made of computers in many subjects since the previous inspection, for example in business studies and geography. The quality of equipment now available is very good. However, pupils' skills are not assessed across the curriculum to enable a judgement to be made on their levels of achievement in the subject overall.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

33. In order for the school to improve its standards further:

The head of department with the support of the leadership team should improve standards of attainment and accommodation in art:

- Ensure that pupils are taught subject skills and knowledge to develop understanding progressively, systematically and collectively throughout projects.
- Teach pupils how to manage these projects with time-plans, and set deadlines for the progressive, structured completion of work.
- Rewrite the subject scheme of work to include these changes, and specify end products.
- Improve the presentation of printed resources for pupils.
- Extend the use of information and communication technology by teachers, students and pupils.
- Change and improve accommodation for the subject to reduce distracting noise from adjacent classrooms.

- Timetable sixth form lessons to enable students to learn together.
- Monitor and evaluate the rate of improvement.

(See paragraphs 24 to 27 of this report.)

Improve the teaching of literacy:

- Extend whole-school policy and practice to ensure that the continuity of pupils' learning of literacy skills when they transfer from primary schools is maintained.
- Ensure that teachers consistently adapt and mark work for pupils of all ages and levels of attainment in literacy to enable them to achieve accuracy in writing and presentation of work of consistently high quality.
- Make full use of specialist teaching of English for pupils in Years 7 and 8.
- Monitor and evaluate the rate of improvement.

(This issue is recognised in the school's development plan, and was part of an issue from the last inspection. See paragraphs 28 to 31 of this report.)

Improve the curriculum in Years 10 and 11:

- Provide all pupils with their statutory entitlement to measure, record, control and automate events using information and communication technology.
- Further extend assessment of the increasingly very good practice in use of information and communication technology across the school.

(See paragraph 32 of this report.)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	76
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	21

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
7	28	38	25	3	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons. Figures do not total 100 because of rounding.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	840	137
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	33	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	11	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	106	0

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	11
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	9

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	7
National comparative data	8

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.1
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	74	63	137

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	63	64	63
	Girls	55	53	50
	Total	118	117	113
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	85 (85)	85 (83)	82 (78)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	44 (52)	67 (63)	59 (47)
	National	28 (27)	41 (38)	29 (24)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	68	65	61
	Girls	57	53	51
	Total	125	118	112
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	91 (67)	86 (82)	82 (89)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	56 (34)	66 (59)	53 (50)
	National	30 (31)	39 (37)	31 (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	61	69	130

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	36	60	60
	Girls	44	68	68
	Total	80	128	128
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	62 (71)	99 (99)	99 (99)
	National	49 (47)	89 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	46.6 (48.4)
	National	38.7 (38)

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

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	29	26	55

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	29.0	28.6	28.8 (23.1)	4.0	N/A	4.0 (2.0)
National	**	**	** (17.9)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.8)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate	
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	6	83.33
	National		80

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	976
Any other minority ethnic group	1

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	21	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	55.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.5

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	6
Total aggregate hours worked per week	40

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.1
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	24.8
Key Stage 4	23.8

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	2149087
Total expenditure	2110079
Expenditure per pupil	2291
Balance brought forward from previous year	44315
Balance carried forward to next year	83323

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	977
Number of questionnaires returned	350

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	40	53	4	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	41	53	3	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	27	63	5	1	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	23	56	15	3	3
The teaching is good.	32	61	2	1	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	28	51	15	3	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	46	43	7	1	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	56	39	2	1	3
The school works closely with parents.	23	52	19	3	5
The school is well led and managed.	34	52	5	1	8
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	39	51	4	1	6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	33	48	9	1	8

Figures may not total 100 because of rounding.

Other issues raised by parents

Most parents are keenly interested in their children's progress and have very high expectations of the school to provide information and work closely with them. The inspection team's judgement on these issues is referred to in the summary of the report. Some parents considered that the humanities course in Years 7 and 8 constrained their children's progress, especially in English; this matter is considered in the second item of the section headed, *What could be improved*, above. The overwhelming majority of parents are confident that their children like school and do well there.

