

INSPECTION REPORT

MAGDALEN COLLEGE SCHOOL

Brackley

LEA area: Northamptonshire

Unique reference number: 122904

Headteacher: Mrs Elaine Wotherspoon

Reporting inspector: Mrs Sylvia Richardson
[1038]

Dates of inspection: 13th to 17th November 2000

Inspection number: 223793

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:	Voluntary Controlled
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Waynflete Avenue Brackley Northamptonshire
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs J Copas
Date of previous inspection:	November 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mrs Sylvia Richardson (1038)	Registered inspector		How high are standards? How well are pupils taught? How good are curricular and other opportunities? How well is the school led and managed?
Mr Husain Akhtar (9561)	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development: How well does the school take care of its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with the parents
Miss Gill Biscomb (7527)	Team inspector	Special educational needs Equality of opportunity	
Mr Keith Brammer (30941)	Team Inspector	English, drama and literacy	
Mr John Godwood (18242)	Team Inspector	Mathematics and numeracy	How high are standards? (support)
Mr Michael Davidson (2396)	Team inspector	Science	How good are curricular and other opportunities? (support)
Mr Terry Chipp (21954)	Team inspector	Art	
Mrs Lynn Lowery (13805)	Team inspector	Design and technology	
Mr Brian Frederick (13739)	Team inspector	Geography	
Mr Reg Grogan (20716)	Team inspector	History and Religious Education	How good are curricular and other opportunities? (support)
Mrs Eveleen Gillmon (2774)	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT)	
Mr Michael Pennington (13054)	Team inspector	Modern Languages	English as an Additional Language
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Mr Fred Herbert (1078)	Team inspector	Physical Education	
Mrs Val Blackburn (27050)	Team inspector	Vocational courses	Sixth Form

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Magdalen College School, an 11-18 comprehensive, is situated in the market town of Brackley, Northamptonshire. The 1341 pupils, who come from Brackley and its surrounding villages, make this school considerably larger than the average for secondary schools. A significant minority of pupils comes from nearby Buckinghamshire. Brackley enjoys full employment. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is well below the national average, very few pupils come from the ethnic minorities or have English as an additional language. The school had a unit for pupils with special educational needs and still has a well above average proportion of pupils, especially in Years 9, 10 and 11, who need a place on the school's register of special educational needs. In general, pupils in Years 7 and 8, at the age of 11, had slightly better than average attainment, as measured by the tests they took before leaving their primary schools. There are currently 250 sixth form pupils on roll, about thirty of whom have previously attended other institutions for their 11 to 16 education.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a good school where pupils achieve above average standards by the time they reach the age of 16. Progress by pupils with special educational needs is good. There is some under-achievement, particularly by the most able boys. The leadership of the headteacher is good and she has a clear vision of how the school needs to develop. Teaching is good overall. Management is effective; budgets are well spent, with the result that the value for money is good.

What the school does well

- Teaching is generally good: in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, it is often very good.
- Standards in national tests and public examinations, which are above average, and in most subjects, still improving.
- Setting priorities and targets for development for the school as a whole.
- Special educational needs and learning support.
- Leadership by the headteacher, which is purposeful and gives a strong sense of direction to the school.
- Achieves high standards of skill in using information and communication technology.

What could be improved

- The attainment of some boys.
- The small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching, especially in English and science.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual development.
- Pupils' understanding of a wide range of world cultures, and of multi-cultural Britain.
- Provision for assemblies and a daily act of collective worship.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Magdalen College School has improved since the time of the last inspection in November 1995. The school has about 200 more pupils. It has undergone a major building programme and refurbishment of accommodation. There have been significant developments in curriculum provision in the last five years, for example, the addition of a vocational programme for Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Improved curriculum planning has resulted in less commuting between sites, which has helped both pupils and teachers. Standards at the ages of 14 and 16 remain above average, but the gap in performance between boys and girls remains. It has successfully been addressed in mathematics, drama and business studies, however. Standards in the sixth form have risen. Although overall, teaching is at least satisfactory and over two thirds is good, there are still some incidents of unsatisfactory teaching. Self-evaluation has been introduced into the school with good effect. Religious education is now available for all in Key Stage 4, but not yet for all in the sixth form. The issue of a daily act of collective worship has not been resolved.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14, 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
Key Stage 3	A	B	A	D	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
GCSE examinations	B	A	B	E	
A-levels/AS-levels	C	D	C		

Despite variations from year to year, standards compare well with national standards and the trend of improvement is similar to the national trend at the ages of both 14 and 16. However, compared with schools with similar numbers of pupils entitled to free school meals, performance at the age of 16 is well below average. This is largely due to the high representation of pupils with special educational needs, and the school's commendable determination to include them in all activities and a full programme of examination courses. This effect is demonstrated clearly when the GCSE results are compared with pupils' own earlier attainment: progress at GCSE is then average for similar schools. There is, however, some under-performance of some potentially high attaining boys. The school did not meet its ambitious GCSE target in 2000, largely due to a fall-back in science results.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Mainly good. Pupils are interested in their work and participate well in activities offered in class and after school.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Generally good. There are some pockets of inappropriate behaviour, particularly associated with the unsatisfactory teaching. Behaviour when commuting between buildings across a main road is very good.
Personal development and relationships	Pupils develop mature attitudes as they go through the school. Relationships are good.
Attendance	Above the national average. There is little unauthorised absence.

Most pupils know well why they are in school and display a sense of purpose in their lessons. The atmosphere in the school as a whole is secure and pupils support each other and are interested in each other's progress. There has been improvement in attendance since the time of the last inspection.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Satisfactory	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 in English in Key Stage 3 is generally good. Four English lessons, however, were unsatisfactory and one of these was poor. Much was satisfactory and some good in science, with three lessons that were unsatisfactory. English and science between them account for seven of the thirteen unsatisfactory lessons seen. Teaching is good in mathematics. Teaching in art, design and technology, geography and history, music and physical education was consistently at least satisfactory with high proportions of good and very good teaching. In these subjects, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can do. The teaching of reading and writing leads to good progress with an effective literacy intervention strategy for Year 7 in place. Teaching in ICT lessons is good, but more variable in subjects; some subject teachers are making good use of ICT, which supports the high standards pupils achieve. Plans to implement a numeracy strategy are at an early stage. Other subjects are not yet actively providing teaching in numeracy. Teachers' provision for pupils with special educational needs is generally good, and very good in much of the specific teaching.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum meets requirements in all areas except the provision of religious education in the sixth form. There is appropriate provision of work-related opportunities and extra-curricular provision is good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The learning support department provides high quality teaching, sets clear targets for improvement and is successful in enabling pupils to achieve them.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for pupils' spiritual development is unsatisfactory and there is still no daily act of collective worship for all pupils. The access pupils have to a broader context of cultural development including that of a multi-cultural Britain is too narrow. Social and moral development are good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pupils receive good guidance on careers and future education. Pastoral support and attention to pupils' welfare, which are under review by the school, are satisfactory.

The introduction of a work-related programme in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form is an improvement since the last inspection and provides fulfilment and a sense of purpose for many pupils. Despite the size of the school, pupils are well known to staff who provide at least satisfactory support.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher provides clear and purposeful leadership and there is a strong sense of direction, despite difficulties over the last year in staffing the senior management team.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body gives effective support and has been influential in ensuring that staff are held fully to account for the work of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The introduction of self-review has helped to raise standards and is now fully accepted as a key quality assurance procedure in the school. In view of the quality of data provided for heads of departments, responses should be more focused, including having short-term goals.
The strategic use of resources	Very good

The school is appropriately staffed with well-qualified teachers and learning support assistants. Accommodation is fully used; there is no slack. Recent additions to the permanent accommodation stock are of high quality. Some of the science accommodation, in mobile classrooms, is of a poor standard. The school is generally well resourced. Recent improvements in the provision of computers support the curriculum developments well, but there are still some shortages.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents are happy to ask questions and tell the school about problems, anticipating the school's support. Teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. The school helps their children become mature and caring adults. Pupils make good progress at school. Pupils like coming to school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They would like better and more frequent information about the detail of their children's progress. They would like the school to work more closely with them. The parents' evenings are inconveniently timed between 4 and 6pm for many parents. There is too long a gap between parents' evenings in Year 7 and in Year 8.

The inspectors agree with parents that the school is open about what it is doing and that they welcome an opportunity to answer parents' questions. They also agree with the generally positive tone of parents' responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire. Recent changes to parent consultation and monitoring arrangements should meet parents' concerns about the quality and frequency of information about their children's progress. Teachers have high expectations and the school fosters good behaviour and attitudes, giving pupils opportunities to mature. Pupils make good progress in lessons and over time. Parents are right to voice their concerns about parents' evenings, which are inconveniently timed.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Attainment at Magdalen College School is generally above the national average, as it was at the time of the last inspection. Pupils in the current Years 7 and 8 have a better than average background of learning when they arrive at the school. Older years, however, still retain a larger than average proportion of pupils - a significant minority - in all the upper years of the school who have special educational needs, some of which are severe. This is one of the factors which results in this summary analysis, that the standards reached by pupils at the key ages of 14 and 16 over the period since the last inspection, whilst being above or well above average in many respects, indicate there is some limited under-achievement. This is especially the case with potentially high achieving boys. The best progress overall is made between the ages of 14 and 16. Progress between the ages of 11 and 14 is not sufficient to ensure that all achieve as well as they might, despite attainment being above average when the school's results are compared with those nationally.
2. In English, standards are above average when compared with all schools nationally. Eighty-four per cent of pupils attained the nationally expected level 5-6 in 2000; this is well above the average for 1999 – averages for 2000 are not yet available. This maintained the standards set in 1999 for success at level 5, although the proportion of pupils who gained the higher grades of level 6 and above fell. More girls attained these higher grades than did boys. In mathematics, whilst about the same proportion of pupils as in English attained the nationally expected level 5-6, a far higher percentage attained levels 6, 7 and 8. The overall standard was well above the national average and better than in 1999. Boys attained better than did the girls at level 5, but less well at levels 6, 7 and 8. In science, attainment was also well above the national average but lower overall than for mathematics, with little distinction between the performance of boys and girls. There was no change from 1999. Few pupils attained the higher levels in science.
3. Overall, the trend for improvement at the age of 14 since the time of the last inspection has been broadly in line with the national trend. This statement masks variation in standards between the subjects, variation of which the school is aware – for example, that science results have not improved for the last three years and that the 2000 results for English represented regression rather than improvement. Of the three core subjects, only mathematics has produced consistently improving results, with the exception of 1998, when they dipped. It also masks wide fluctuations in the performance of boys and girls in science. In 1999, for example, girls heavily out-performed boys, but in 2000 this was reversed. The other concern for the school, of which senior managers are well aware, is that English and science are not adding the degree of improvement to pupils' performance at the age of 14 which is being added by mathematics. In particular, the gap between the standards reached in English by girls and boys widens as they proceed from Year 7 to Year 9.
4. At the age of 14, teachers' assessments of attainment for 2000 in the other subjects of the National Curriculum show that performance was above average overall and, in some subjects, it was well above average. It was above average in information and communication technology, with girls outperforming boys slightly at level 6 and significantly at level 7. The same is true in geography and history, where the gap between girls and boys is wider at level 6 and results are well above the national average for 1999 – those for 2000 not currently being available. In modern languages, boys perform well below the nationally expected figure for all schools, and the gap between the performance of girls and that of boys is wider than the national gap in 1999. In design and technology, the picture is somewhat more complex: girls' performance in 2000 was above the national expectation for both levels 5 and 6, but few girls attained the higher levels of 7 and 8. A very high proportion of the boys achieves level 5, but few level 6 and only one, level 7. Standards in art, music and physical education show that the vast majority of pupils in all three subjects are reaching standards in line with national expectations. In art, over half, and in music almost half the pupils exceed expectations. Over three-quarters attained close to the expected standards in religious education (RE) in teachers' assessments of attainment in 1999, although attainment seen in class

during the inspection was slightly below average.

5. The school set itself ambitious targets for improvement in GCSE results, and these were partially met; only in science was the target not met. This had a considerable impact on the achievement of the overall school target. At the age of 16, in GCSE examinations, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more passes, or their GNVQ equivalent, at grades A* to C was above the national average in 1999. Results improved further in 2000 in a number of subjects. The proportion of those obtaining 5 or more passes at grades A* to G was well above the national average. The trend of improvement over the last three years has been broadly in line with the national trend. The highest levels of improvement have consistently been in mathematics, art, music, physical education, English and business studies. In this key stage, as in Key Stage 3, however, whilst boys' results were above the national average, those of the girls were often well above. When measured against schools with similar intakes, two different effects emerge: the school is well below others with low levels of eligibility to free school meals, but close to average on the basis of improvement between Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4.
6. Standards reached by girls are consistently above or well above average in art, business studies and double award science. Results in 1999 and 2000 confirm this. Results are similarly above the national average for boys in art, business studies and design and technology. The discrepancy between the performance of boys and girls, which was identified at the time of the last inspection, remains. Mathematics has addressed it well, and helps boys to make fast progress based on their prior attainment. English has, in recent months, begun to address the issue, but remains an area upon which the school should concentrate its standards-raising effort, along with science.
7. Up to and including 1999, the average point score of pupils taking more than two A level subjects or the equivalent has been close to the national average (at around 16 points per student). However, in 2000, the overall point score rose to an average of eighteen per pupils, with girls attaining slightly better than boys. For pupils taking less than two A levels or their equivalent, the average point score has increased each year until, in 1999, it was comparable to that found nationally – about 2.8. In 2000, the average point score increased to seven, well above the 1999 national average, but comparisons are unreliable as there were few pupils involved.
8. Pupils entered for Advanced General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) have increased in number since 1998, but attainment has not followed a definable trend. The school's average points score in 2000 was 11.3. Of those pupils who take Intermediate level GNVQ, 63% attained qualifications in the last two years, which compares satisfactorily with the national picture.
9. In the sixth form, in subjects such as art, textiles, business studies, geography and mathematics, pupils consistently achieve results which are at least in line with predictions based on their GCSE results, and often better these. This confirms that the teaching and provision made in these subjects add considerable value to pupils' own efforts. Conversely, there have been some subjects, notably biology and German, which have not created such good progress and pupils have not attained grades in A level examinations which match their potential. In other subjects, no consistent year on year pattern of added value occurs. Analysis of results by boys and girls at A level in the years 1998 to 2000 show considerable variations. Despite having attained very similar average point scores at GCSE each year, girls are consistently outperforming boys at A level in terms of the grades they achieve in relation to their potential. The school is aware of this anomaly and is beginning to address the question of boys' performance at this level.
10. Whilst the standard of literacy at the school is generally good, a whole school literacy policy is gradually helping the process of raising overall standards. The summer school and intervention programme for Year 7 pupils are particularly effective innovations. Good practice was observed in a number of subjects, though it tended to be incidental rather than planned in subjects other than English.
11. Pupils are generally able to cope with the numerical demands of other subjects. In geography, they present numerical data using a variety of graphs, with increasing sophistication and accuracy as they proceed through the school. Science teaching does not actively promote numeracy, but pupils

organise and present data and manipulate formulae with the help of a calculator. In design and technology they measure accurately, calculate the nutritional value of foods and use mathematics in programming computers to control events.

12. Pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) in most areas of the curriculum, mainly as an aid to presentation both oral and written. They use word processing software with confidence and increasing competence as they proceed through the school, and can integrate tables and images into text to produce high quality work. They understand well the structure of information through the use of databases and can use spreadsheets in a variety of contexts. Their increasing skills in this area contribute significantly to the quality of coursework for examinations in some other subjects and acts as a motivator for many who have difficulties with fine motor skills. They are familiar with using a range of communication and online resources to undertake research exercises, and they do this with increasing sophistication as they gain experience. Many pupils with special educational needs achieve standards in ICT above those in other subject areas.
13. A significant number of pupils have high levels of special educational need, ranging from moderate difficulties with literacy to specific difficulties (dyslexia). Some pupils have emotional and behavioural difficulties that affect their learning. There are also pupils with special educational needs in Years 9, 10 and 11, who are at the school at the request of the local education authority, although this is not their nearest school. In all, a fifth of the school population is on the school's register of special educational need and fifteen per cent require their own learning plans and targets. Thirty-seven pupils have statements of special educational needs, which is above the national average. For their age, their standards of achievement when they enter the school are well below the level expected. They make steady progress through Key Stage 3 and in the majority of subjects by the end of Key Stage 4, with the result that achievement is better than their prior learning would have indicated.
14. There are no pupils in the process of learning English for the first time. The very small number of pupils from other ethnic groups progresses at the same rate as their peers.
15. Progress for pupils with learning difficulties is good overall and in particular in the individual and small group lessons in the learning support department. Information from subject teachers, contributing to the annual reviews of progress of the pupils with statements, shows that the majority of pupils make progress towards their targets for learning and behaviour. There are examples of the school reducing the level of support as the pupils make sufficient progress to manage unaided, without extra teaching or support. In subject lessons, girls and boys with special educational needs made good progress in music, art, business studies, geography and history and girls in English and ICT. The good progress in lessons is due to skilled teaching and to pupils' willingness to learn.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

16. Pupils' attitudes are mainly good and help their learning. The vast majority of parents feel that their children like the school; this is evident in the friendly way in which pupils mix with each other and staff, and approach work in lessons. Most pupils work with strong commitment in lessons and this helps them to make good progress. This was evident, for example, in a Year 9 information and technology lesson where pupils were learning how to register an email address, in a Year 13 mathematics lesson where pupils were practising 'mean average' and in a Year 11 science lesson where pupils were looking into complex chemical reactions. In some lessons, pupils are compliant rather than enthusiastic, for example, in some modern languages lessons. There is also a significant minority, including some pupils with behavioural difficulties and low attaining boys who are not adequately interested in lessons who sometimes take a long time to settle down, cannot remain on task for long and cause disruptions. However, these are usually well contained. Most pupils do their homework and coursework efficiently and present it thoughtfully. Another example of pupils' positive attitudes involves their participation in extra-curricular activities, which is good, particularly in the sports activities. Pupils with special educational needs respond well to the support that they receive and are active in trying to improve their learning. Good relationships and good teaching have positive impacts on pupils' attitudes.

17. Pupils' attendance has improved since the last inspection and is now good. Unauthorised absence is below the national average, but in Year 11 it is higher than that in the rest of the school, mostly due to a small amount of truancy. Punctuality is generally good and pupils move between lessons and sites swiftly. This is an improvement since the time of the last inspection.
18. Some parents expressed their dissatisfaction with the standard of pupils' behaviour in the school. Inspectors found that behaviour is mainly good. Most pupils conduct themselves in a sensible and mature manner in classrooms and many, particularly older pupils and those in higher ability classes, behave very well. Within the school there are, however, small but significant minorities of pupils who either have behavioural difficulties or have low ability and easily become frustrated if not well managed. Pockets of challenging and disruptive behaviour were observed in a small number of lessons, particularly where teaching was unsatisfactory, for example, in some English and some science lessons. Pupils are open and friendly, and they move around the school and between the sites in an orderly way. They treat the school's property with care. Records indicate some bullying in the school but inspectors saw no incidents of any oppressive behaviour. The school is firm on behaviour. The number of fixed period exclusions has doubled since the last inspection but it is below average for secondary schools of this size and type. Exclusions have been for appropriate reasons, including assault, and mostly for only two or three days. Correct procedures for exclusions have been followed. Four pupils were permanently excluded at the time of the last inspection; this time there are none.
19. Pupils develop maturity and responsibility as they progress through the school. Relationships in the school are good. Almost all groups of pupils work together well; many good examples were seen, for example, in physical education, science and design and technology lessons. Pupils show respect for each other, including the feelings and opinions of others; for example, they listen courteously to others during whole class discussions, as was the case in many personal and social development (PSD) lessons. A good example was seen in a Year 13 PSD lesson where pupils were discussing the impact of Remembrance Sunday.
20. Most pupils, particularly the older pupils, take initiative and show responsible attitudes towards their learning, for example, the sixth form pupils take responsibility for developing their own personal themes in art. Pupils organise their coursework well. Many pupils take an active part in the life of the school where there are opportunities for them to do so. For example, the school council is well supported. Pupils work effectively and courteously as messengers. Sixth form pupils volunteer to assist in lessons and this help is much appreciated by teachers and pupils. Pupils show responsibility when working independently, as when they do unsupervised work in the resources centre, using a good range of research materials, including the Internet. The small number of pupils from ethnic minority groups, and the much larger number of pupils with special educational needs, is well integrated into the life of the school.
21. The generally good position at the time of the previous inspection has been sustained.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

22. At the time of the last inspection, teaching was satisfactory or better in four out of every five lessons seen. It is now better than this. There were some weaknesses at the time of the last inspection which were addressed in the months immediately following the last inspection, but since that time, although the overall position is satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and good in the rest of the school, some other minor weaknesses have arisen. The incidence of unsatisfactory teaching, whilst only rarely occurring, has clearly identifiable causes and the school is monitoring these cases carefully to effect improvement. Of the two hundred and thirty lessons seen during this inspection, teaching in one hundred and one was good and in forty-three it was very good. Three were outstanding; sixty-nine were satisfactory and teaching in some of these had some good features. Thirteen lessons, over half of which were in Key Stage 3 classes and in science and English, were unsatisfactory and one was poor. In the sixth form, no teaching seen was unsatisfactory. In almost all cases, the learning matches the teaching, so where lessons are unsatisfactory, there is not enough learning.

23. Most of the teaching was securely based, with teachers justifiably confident in their subject knowledge. They had a good grasp of how to present their subjects to pupils to interest them, and in many instances, real enthusiasm for the subject is conveyed. For example, in most art and business studies lessons, confident and well-planned teaching managed to involve pupils in their own work and help them make good progress. Teaching is a particular strength in art, mathematics, music, business studies, physical education, learning support and geography. Aspects of design and technology are also well taught.
24. Many teachers use a wide range of teaching methods to present their subjects in stimulating ways, such as skilful questioning, debate, practical work and discussion on both class and group bases. These methods have the effect of sustaining and developing pupils' interests and challenging them to think more deeply about tasks set. In general, teachers have high expectations of what pupils can achieve in a lesson, and most pupils respond well to this. The single most pervasive weakness in the teaching, however, which affects that which is otherwise satisfactory or good, is the lack of recognition of the needs of the ablest boys and how to motivate them to higher attainment. Whilst almost all teachers are aware of some underachievement by boys, only some subject departments have specifically spent time to plan in detail what is needed to increase the rate of progress of this group.
25. The teaching of English varies between very good and poor. In total, there were four English lessons where teaching and consequently learning were unsatisfactory. Although individual reasons can easily be identified, such as the presence of a teacher unfamiliar with the class and the materials, urgent management action is necessary to ensure that the best practice in teaching English is shared by all of the department's teachers. In the very good teaching in English, as in a Year 11 lesson when pupils were being helped to consider their views on an anthology of writing, the use of skilful questioning encouraged pupils to be confident in their opinions. They were helped to structure their answers carefully and systematically, so that later written work would convey the perceptive views they could express in speaking. Very good planning and organisation of the lesson, as in a Year 9 drama lesson, also ensured pupils' interest from the outset and kept them working hard throughout it. In a Year 10 lesson on 'An Inspector Calls', there was a very clear structure of high expectations where the needs of higher attaining boys were uppermost, and the devices used were responsible for them making very good progress overall. In a Year 8 lesson on a story by Conan Doyle, pupils were encouraged to make inferences about characters from textual clues by good use of instruction, enthusiasm for the subject on the part of the teacher and well-directed individual support. In the unsatisfactory teaching in English, pupils were not adequately helped to understand the nature of their tasks, and teaching elicited few questions with any depth. Consequently, they were little engaged in their work and quickly became bored. The teaching failed to meet the needs of the class and pupils did not learn enough.
26. Mathematics teaching was almost all at least satisfactory and much was good or very good. In Key Stage 3, most was good and very good, and in Key Stage 4, all but one lesson were at least satisfactory and ranged from satisfactory to very good. Teaching in the sixth form made good use of resources and pupils were immediately involved in their lessons, which often had a thought-provoking intent. An AS level group for example, pupils came to understand and make conceptual links on the subject of radian measure and trigonometric graphs. Very good teaching in a Year 11 higher attaining group offered very challenging work, to which pupils responded very well, and innovative use of paired work helped all pupils to judge their own work and make very good progress. A top set in Year 9 learnt very well when studying indices, as a result of good questioning and management of the class. A lower attaining set in the same year were extremely well supported in some probability experiments, consequently some were quite quickly able to use reasoning to predict the outcomes of a simple experiment. The teacher's high expectations that all would reflect individually on their work was putting in place the foundation for future work.
27. Science teaching was better in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, than in Key Stage 3, although there were also some weaknesses in Key Stage 4. In the good science lessons, objectives for what the pupils had to learn were clear to all and time was well used. A sixth form lesson in geology, part of the science department, preparing for a forthcoming field trip showed the best characteristics of the subject: very good planning, secure subject knowledge, lively presentation and excellent relationships made for fast progress and depth of understanding. In general, pupils were well managed when in laboratories, but in some of the weaker lessons, behaviour was not well managed

and pupils did little work. These unsatisfactory lessons were also characterised by lack of a good planned match between pupils' needs and the work offered. This was true, for example, in a Year 8 science lesson when all pupils in a mixed ability class were expected to tackle the same work and make progress at roughly the same rate. The result was that progress was quite slow for all.

28. The teaching of literacy is developing fast, with the main effort put into Year 7 and following up the work done in the primary schools. Many teachers also make a point in their planning to reinforce key vocabulary required for their subjects, to check spelling and to encourage pupils to speak clearly. This practice is not yet consistent, however. The teaching of numeracy is less well developed, except in mathematics lessons. An initiative to address pupils' numeracy needs in science and geography is underway. There is as yet insufficient planned support for the development of pupils' numeracy in other lessons.
29. The use of information and communication technology (ICT) resources in support of subject teaching is variable both in frequency and quality. The majority of teachers are aware of the developing skills of the pupils and the increasing ICT resource base. Not all take advantage of these to motivate pupils and stimulate their interest through access to wider resources such as those available via the National Grid for Learning Virtual Teachers Centre and other educational hubs. Many teachers are competent users of generic applications but feel less confident about identifying and using ICT resources to enhance their subject material.
30. The teaching in the personal and social education programme is all at least satisfactory, although little is more than good. Generous staffing ratios ensure that pupils receive some individual attention during these lessons.
31. All the teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory or better with three-quarters of teaching being good or better. The gains made in terms of students' learning match the teaching. Students are taught by subject specialists and this reflects in teachers' very secure subject knowledge. In the very best lessons, teachers use this knowledge to present their subject in a lively and stimulating way, as when a Year 12 class were learning about the principles of geological mapping and using a large scale rock analysis marked on the laboratory floor. This allowed students to see positions and types of rock as they occur, before transferring the map to paper. Students learn well when teachers continually challenge them intellectually with skilful questioning. In home economics, for example, questioning of students explored the influence of culture on shopping and food preparation and, in music, allowed students to analyse their performance of a chosen choral piece. In many good lessons, the teacher assists learning and guides students rather than directing them. A good example of this occurred with a Young Enterprise sixth form group producing novelty clocks and window decorations. In small groups, such as in a Year 13 French class, the teacher compensates for small numbers and lack of peer competition by providing a suitable and stimulating range of resources, or uses a tutorial approach, as seen in music. Where sixth form teaching is not effective, students are not sufficiently challenged. This occurs occasionally in English, where students were not given enough opportunities to develop critical and analytical skills, and in biology, where they are given many notes to copy.
32. Teaching in the learning support department focuses sharply on the pupils' targets for improvement and leads to steady progress in learning – and a consequent raising of confidence and self-esteem. Individual education plans are prepared and distributed. These have targets for improvement which are known to pupils and teachers and are clearly defined and measurable. Not all teachers translate these targets into their own subject plans and some miss opportunities to help develop literacy skills through their lessons.
33. The school has a designated learning support base where much of the specialist teaching of pupils with special educational needs takes place. Teaching in all the lessons seen in the department was satisfactory and very good in more than half. There were excellent and very good lessons in which pupils in Key Stage 4, with extreme difficulties with reading and writing, were taken carefully through word recognition activities. There was a nice balance between known examples and new challenges and all the pupils left the lessons with confidence that they had understood how to recognise and how to write words with particular pairs of letters. The department has a number of computers and uses them with programs designed to help with spelling and reading and for pupils to word process their work so that it is presented well. The use of ICT is well managed as one of a variety of

approaches to improve not only pupils' learning but also their self-esteem. Pupils in a Youth Award Scheme lesson produced very well planned and presented posters to add to their project on crime, following a visit to the local police station. There was an example of pupils reading a play and acting a scene in another lesson but, in general, pupils' speaking is poor, especially in Key Stage 3. They are hesitant readers but very willing to try and they understand most of what they read. Books are chosen which are appropriate in context but with simplified language, such as a version of 'The Tale of Two Cities', being read by a small group of Year 11 pupils.

34. Where a minority of pupils in a class is on the school's register of special educational needs, a support assistant or a support teacher is allocated to work with the class. Teachers often plan with this colleague in advance and sometimes share the teaching or work with groups who need help. In these lessons, pupils learn well. A music lesson was planned with the support assistant taking an active part in playing rhythms to demonstrate to the class, and in another lesson, the teacher and the assistant acted a short scene as an introduction to the pupils' own scene writing. In a history lesson, the assistant had prepared resources on the treatment of the poor in the nineteenth century for a pupils who could not read the text given to the class. As a consequence, the pupils were able to make good progress. Not all classes have additional adult help and this reduces the effectiveness of the teaching for pupils with special educational needs in some, though not all, lessons. Teachers and assistants are sensitive to pupils' feelings about being supported in the class with their peers and support other pupils as well, if this is appropriate. They are also helpful when behaviour is disturbing other pupils' learning.

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

35. The curriculum provided by the school meets the requirement to provide a balanced education for pupils aged 11 to 16 and offers them appropriate breadth. It includes all subjects of the National Curriculum and meets the interests and aptitudes of most, including pupils with special educational needs. The teaching week is of appropriate length. There have been improvements in curriculum provision since the time of the last inspection. Religious education is now taught to all pupils in Key Stage 4, where the results in 1999, the first year group in this position, were below average, but in 2000, they had significantly improved and were close to the national average. There is no provision of a religious education course for all in the sixth form, and this is a breach of national requirements. A vocational programme has been introduced into Key Stage 4 since the time of the last inspection and this significantly adds to equality of opportunity for all pupils, meeting better the needs of those who choose to take it. Curriculum planning closely matches the school's aims and objectives and there is good attention paid to pupils' needs at the time of transition from primary school, so that in most subjects, there is good teacher knowledge of what pupils have learned during Key Stage 2.
36. In Key Stage 3, pupils are in groups arranged by ability for some subjects from Year 8, but some parents are concerned that this arrangement allows some higher ability pupils to 'coast' in Year 7. Inspectors concur with this view. Setting in mathematics in Year 8 is one of the successful strategies which prevent coasting in this subject and make it a model for others in the school. The facility for smaller groups between the ages of 11 and 14 in design and technology helps pupils to get a good start in most aspects of this subject and gives them the individual attention they need.
37. In Key Stage 4, the curriculum provides all pupils with the opportunity to study a wide range of courses, at different appropriate levels. There is much more grouping by ability in this age range, and this has a good effect upon pupils' motivation, teachers' ease of planning and results at the age of 16. Significantly improved facilities for art and the sixth form have provided teachers with a further impetus to develop their courses, but this has not yet happened in foreign languages, where take up in Key Stage 4 is still disappointing. Although almost all pupils continue one language through to GCSE, very few respond to the offer to carry on learning a second language.
38. All pupils now have the opportunity to achieve a GCSE accreditation in information and communication technology (ICT), and this is a strength of the curriculum provision of the school

which is an improvement since the time of the last inspection. Opportunities to reinforce ICT skills, taught separately, are provided in many subject areas, though these are not always consistent and frequently dependent on individual teacher enthusiasm. There remains a need for ICT resourcing and usage to be specified within subject schemes of work. Many pupils use computers at home to produce homework and coursework assignments, and others have access to the equipment in the ICT suites and the school library after school hours for the same purpose, with teachers available to provide help if needed. Extra-curricular activities include participation in competitions, external visits to local business users and suppliers of ICT, and occasional excursions further afield. A substantial number of teachers need specific training in the use of ICT to support teaching as opposed to personal use of generic applications. The development plan provides for the improvement of the departmental resource bases, which will be necessary.

39. The school has integrated recent curriculum changes (following the national initiative, Curriculum 2000) for sixth formers well. It currently offers a very wide range of twenty-two AS subjects to Year 12 students and a similar range of A level subjects to Year 13. Most students follow this type of course. It is planned that all the AS subjects will continue to be offered in 2001 as the new A2 courses. In addition, vocational educational routes are now available through the GNVQ advanced level courses in business studies, leisure and tourism and health and social care. These subjects are also offered at intermediate level for a small number of students who combine them with GCSE studies.
40. Pupils are given good guidance in their choice of sixth form courses and subjects. This is done through a well-planned post-16 choices programme in Year 11, consisting of a broad diet of presentations, interviews and a preparation day in which parents can be involved. Voluntary additional enrichment courses are offered in sports and recreation, community service and a Young Enterprise scheme. Careers education and guidance is delivered through the personal and social development programme by form tutors who frequently involve outside speakers, and this provision is effective. A work experience programme is organised in the main by the students themselves, and enables them to develop broadly based work-related skills.
41. The key skills programme is taken by all students in Year 12 and is delivered as separate lessons for the application of number and for ICT. Communication skills are developed through the medium of students' other subjects and this is less effective than the taught elements. Senior staff maintain an overview of students' progress through this course, as it is a response to a new national initiative, and are aware that further development and training of staff is needed to ensure the effectiveness of the course and give it the necessary status in students' eyes. Students use their planned free time productively, taking good advantage of their sixth form centre for research, access to computers and to staff, and these enhance their independent learning skills.
42. The school makes good provision for the pupils with special educational needs, meeting the requirements of statements, completing the annual reviews on time and providing a variety of curriculum opportunities in Key Stages 3 and 4. The literacy intervention programme for Year 7 pupils and the programmes set up in the learning support department are effective in meeting the pupils' needs. In Key Stage 4, vocational courses are available as an addition or alternative to GCSE and the Youth Award scheme involves community projects and activities. Other opportunities provided by the department, such as the French course and the Lunchtime clubs are planned appropriately for the pupils who are involved. ICT is used wisely in both key stages to extend or consolidate pupils' learning.
43. The school has developed a pattern of provision for pupils' personal development through its personal and social education (PSE) programme, which includes provision for lessons and for whole days of activities. Some parents who attended the pre-inspection parents' meeting were not convinced of the value of the PSE days; none took place during the inspection. However, the school has this provision under review. The lessons seen and the plans for PSD days provide a comprehensive programme of coverage of all the key personal development issues including sex and drugs education. Form tutors teach much of this course, and this leads to some inconsistencies in teaching and planning, but overall, the programme content is comprehensive and worthwhile.

44. The school's curriculum arrangements for pupils' spiritual development are unsatisfactory and, in particular, the spiritual content of assemblies and form tutor time is low. There are few opportunities other than in religious education (RE) and art, for pupils to reflect on beliefs and their own reactions beyond the factual and prosaic. In RE, in Year 9, some pupils were exploring sensitive questions of meaning and purpose and life after death. History offers some access to religious developments through the ages and discussion of medieval concepts such as heaven and hell are planned into schemes of work. Some opportunities are created in geography for pupils to reflect on major environmental and ethical issues of the day, and one such example was seen in science. In other subjects where significant contributions to pupils' spiritual development might be expected, such as English literature and drama, the opportunities were unplanned and therefore limited as to how to use them well. There are also inadequate arrangements for a daily act of collective worship, and this was an issue raised at the time of the last inspection.
45. The school makes significant contributions to pupils' moral and social development, and it is evident in the ethos of the school. Staff provide good role models in the way they treat each other and treat pupils, with care and personal attention, especially when pupils might be experiencing distress. Moral issues are studied in some depth in history and geography, but in other subjects, planning is not sufficiently systematic. However, in tutor time and PSE, issues of right and wrong are explored with sensitivity. Pupils also undertake considerable work for others. Older pupils help meet the learning needs of younger ones, but the relative isolation of the sixth form in the St John's site limits their contribution. The school has not yet fully considered the alternative roles for Year 11 pupils. There is, however, active participation in a school council.
46. Many subjects in the school make a good contribution to pupils' cultural development, although this is confined to a European view of culture and does not take sufficient account of the richness of multi-cultural Britain and the cultures of Africa and the East. English, drama, music, art and business studies all find ways of enriching their courses. In religious education, geography and history, pupils can explore the cultural aspects of different religions and lifestyles.
47. The provision for careers education and guidance is good. There are good resources available in the school and information prior to choices in Year 9 and Year 11 is good. In the sixth form, the guidance available when pupils are considering career and higher education routes is very good. There is a well-planned two-week opportunity for work experience during Key Stage 4 and again in the sixth form, and pupils report that these opportunities are very valuable. Good links are beginning to be made with local employers, some of whom provide mentoring for Year 11 pupils on a regular basis. Links with partner institutions are good, and the quality of information and dialogue about pupils' work and about curriculum is improving year on year.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

48. The key stage co-ordinators, tutors and other members of staff are aware of the individual needs of the pupils, and of any action that needs to be taken. Proper procedures are in place to address issues of health and safety. Regular risk assessments are carried out, and good attention is given to health and safety in lessons. The welfare assistant is a qualified nurse and warmly looks after unwell pupils. Arrangements for child protection are satisfactory; the designated person is well aware of procedures and keeps other members of staff informed about the issues involved but the school has no formal policy on child protection at present, a matter which the governors should urgently address. Procedures to protect pupils from any oppressive behaviour are successful. Pupils are happy at the school. All this has a positive impact on the quality of education received by the pupils.
49. The arrangements for supporting pupils and monitoring their personal development are good. Form tutors take much of the responsibility for pupils' personal development in their pastoral role. The school keeps good records about pupils' personal development, and aspects are discussed at the regular pastoral meetings. Personal and social education is mostly good but the organisation of and time available for the PSE programme does not fully do justice to the comprehensive content

envisaged. Pupils receive satisfactory guidance on matters related to their health, welfare and futures. There is a lively able pupils' programme which is attracting a range of pupils; mentoring for middle-ability Year 11 pupils, who want to raise their grades at GCSE, has been arranged, as well as work groups in English and mathematics, to help the pupils concerned in improving their academic performance. The provision for pupils with special educational needs and for disaffected pupils is good and effectively supports their learning.

50. There is a recognised system of referral to the learning support department; tests for reading and spelling are added to the reporting information, or to the Key Stage 2 National Curriculum test results and previous school reports, before an assessment is made of the pupils' needs and a plan prepared. A counsellor attends the school on a part-time basis to work with pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Annual reviews of progress for pupils with statements of special educational need are thorough; parents are provided before the meeting with a well-produced report highlighting the successes the pupils have had in meeting the targets and suggesting where others need to be considered. The pupils are encouraged to be involved and interested and to recognise ways in which targets which have not been met can be tackled. In the review seen during the inspection, the lead teacher was sensitive to the parents' concerns and successfully found solutions to them. A shortcoming in the school's provision for academic support is the lack of effective strategies to address underachievement by boys. Pupils are well supported by specialists including the education welfare officer who visits the school regularly.
51. Procedures for ensuring good attendance are effective. Recording and reporting requirements are met. The recently introduced computerised system to process attendance provides valuable statistical information which helps in monitoring attendance. Absences are promptly followed and the services of the education welfare officer are wisely used. Lateness is carefully monitored but promptness to lessons is not always demanded by subject teachers. Attendance is good.
52. The procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' behaviour are good. The good work and behaviour of pupils is acknowledged and rewarded by staff through certificates and commendations. Where incidents of inappropriate behaviour occur, pupils are sanctioned, including exclusions. Procedures for eliminating bullying and oppressive behaviour are satisfactory. There is some inappropriate behaviour but those involved are mostly dealt with successfully within the school. The positive behaviour management strategies are generally well used in most lessons. Pastoral system, pupil planners and the computer-based internal monitoring system help in monitoring behaviour.
53. The procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are satisfactory, overall. The results of national tests and tests administered in Year 7 are analysed to build up a picture of pupils' attainment when they arrive at the school and to predict outcomes. This helps in grouping them and in identifying those who need support. Arrangements are in place in most subjects for assessing pupils' attainment and progress as they pass through the school but the practice across subjects, particularly the use of assessment information, is not consistent. For example, assessment is well organised in mathematics but not well used in adjusting the curriculum and monitoring pupils' progress. In modern languages, assessment information is not conveyed to pupils often enough, and monitoring of pupils' progress is generally unsatisfactory. It is a weakness in music where aspects of work are assessed but not linked to National Curriculum levels. In religious education, there is a case for standardisation of assessment. Pupils with special educational needs are identified and assessed correctly and their individual education plans are carefully prepared.
54. The monitoring of pupils' performance in their academic work is satisfactory overall with some good recent innovations in the structures used for co-ordination. A computerised system enables the pupils' academic progress to be monitored on fixed criteria as subject teachers, in reviewing progress, award scores and set the target from a bank of statements. These are well adjusted to ensure that they are personalised for each pupil. However, the quality of the targets set is not consistent across the school and targets are not always subject specific. Pupils generally know how they are getting on but not always in terms of National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades, except at appropriate stages. The database is used well to analyse individual and group performance, and to work whether pupils have made enough progress. The statistical information is

presented to heads of departments, but inconsistent use is made of this data for monitoring by departments and in planning, for example, to address imbalance in the achievement by groups of pupils.

55. In the sixth form, the school has done much analysis of the results students obtain in relation to their predicted grades and GCSE results. This progress analysis has been done not only on an individual student by student basis, but also by gender groups and subjects. This has allowed the school to place subjects in rank order over the last three years for the value they are adding to both boys' and girls' attainment at A level. Students' progress is assessed every half term by subject teachers and tutors may involve parents if needed. Annual parental reports contain an effective overview of progress that provides a good basis for a thorough mentoring process. There remains, nonetheless, scope for further development of the role of the form tutor to provide an effective overview of academic and social progress and to act as an academic mentor.
56. The school is as effective in promoting pupils' welfare, health and safety, as it was at the time of the last inspection. Underperformance by boys is still an issue. The school was criticised for not having properly established the link between pastoral and academic guidance; the pastoral system is under review, but the pastoral and academic links are generally satisfactory.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

57. Links with parents are now effective. Parents did not play a particularly prominent part in school life at the time of the last inspection; this has improved somewhat but the school still finds it very difficult to gain widespread parental involvement, though it is generally satisfactory. Parents are generally supportive of the school's work. An unusually large number of parents returned questionnaires to give their views on the school and these were generally positive.
58. Parents are pleased with the school's expectations, which are high, and the support for their children's personal development, with which they are satisfied. A significant minority of parents is unhappy about the information they receive on their children's progress and the ways in which the school works with them. They are largely justified insofar as they complain about their knowledge of pupils' progress, which is not well reported. The annual progress reports, whilst informative about progress, give little information about what pupils or their parents can do to improve academic standards; the targets set are mostly of a pastoral nature. In between the reports, parents get the results of internal monitoring in terms of the scores awarded in each subject, based on fixed criteria. The monitoring scores do not indicate what a pupil should be attaining, nor do they relate, in many cases, to National Curriculum levels.
59. Some parents have found it difficult to contact subject teachers by phone but this difficulty has now been satisfactorily resolved. Some parents are less satisfied with the amount of homework and range of activities outside lessons. Inspectors found that homework is set regularly in most lessons, the amount is generally appropriate and provision for the extra-curricular activities is good. The school sends out newsletters which helpfully explain to parents what constitutes the homework or the extra-curricular activities offered. However, senior management is fully aware that it will have to continue to be vigilant to ensure that best practice is maintained and that communications with parents are increasingly effective.
60. The governors fulfil their responsibilities to publish a prospectus and report to parents, though attendance at the governors' annual meeting with parents remains low. There are some other areas to which the school should attend, for example the prospectus does not include national comparators for tests and public examinations, arrangements for worship and parents right of withdrawal from sex education and religious education. The governors' recent annual report has not reported progress in implementing the last post-inspection action plan, which is a statutory requirement. Whilst attendance at parents' evenings is better than at formal meetings, some parents find it difficult to attend parents' evenings which are held between 4 and 6pm, and express concerns about this. There is no established system to consult parents on matters that impact upon financial decisions or to explain how the school monitors its work and pupils' performance. However, in the last two years, the school has increasingly used 'focus groups' for consultation on policy and aspects of the life of the school. This is an effective tool in improving communications with parents and in involving them in practical ways with the development of the school.
61. Use of the 'pupil planners' for a two-way contact is satisfactory, although there are some inconsistencies in the ways in which individual teachers use these. Parent's participation in social and fund-raising events is good. Some parents assist with sports – coaching, and in the library. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are appropriately involved in the IEP process.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

62. The headteacher provides clear vision and a sense of purpose to the school through her leadership. She focuses on the importance of what goes on in the classroom, hence her emphasis on ensuring that the subject departments undertake observation of teaching in order to raise standards. The head is well supported by her governing body, which contains several members who are heavily involved in working with senior staff to create an effective 'critical friend' in the governors. Senior managers are very loyal and committed to the headteacher's aspirations, to the aims of the school and to individual effectiveness, but recent changes and long absences caused by illness have weakened the team's coherence, which is now returning as new appointments are made and come on stream. It is the robust underlying structures which have sustained the team's effectiveness through a difficult period. The appointment of another assistant head teacher, very necessary in the light of the size of the school, is now imminent, to complete the senior management team. The aims of the school are fulfilled by:
- a good curriculum structure which offers pupils wide-ranging opportunities
 - extra-curricular activities which are broadly based and involve a large number of pupils
 - a caring ethos in which form tutors are developing a broader role
 - a well-embedded system of monitoring of teaching and learning, introduced and developed by this headteacher
 - good quality development planning
 - very good financial management, including very helpful oversight by governors.
63. The governing body is effective at fulfilling its roles, both as supporter and critical friend. All statutory responsibilities are fulfilled with the exception of the provision of religious education in the sixth form and some aspects of the information provided for parents. Governors have not resolved the question raised at the time of the last inspection of how to provide an act of collective worship for all pupils. Governors are, however, involved with departments, the budget planning and development planning cycles. They are well aware of the school's strengths and weaknesses and engage in active debate on both. Governors are very well supported in their committees and in plenary by senior staff advisers who provide them with high quality information and ideas. They have also played an active part in reviewing the school's accommodation and helping to effect the major changes of recent years.
64. Each member of the senior management team brings different skills to the task of policy making, monitoring and managing a very large split-site school. However, until all members of the team are fully in place, job descriptions and roles will remain relatively ill defined. There is no evidence of duplication of effort, however, and some of the devices employed to ensure that each member of the team acquires full expertise in a management area, such as the servicing of governors' committees and working with departments in a monitoring role, are working well. However, there is some inconsistency, resulting from pressures on time, in the ways in which different senior managers follow-up the departmental self-reviews, with the result that progress has been somewhat mixed.
65. Since the time of the last inspection, the school has fully introduced the practice of self-review. Almost all departments have experienced one cycle of self-review, and some approach their second. Arrangements for performance management have been successfully adapted to merge with the self-review programme to avoid losing the benefits of either. Good progress is being made in extending the roles of middle managers, and this emerges in their long-term development planning. However, in some cases, departmental managers have omitted the vital step of short-term action planning, against which they could measure their success in developing their areas of the school. A few of the departmental self-reviews have not yet faced up to the issue of how to deal with the attainment of under-achieving pupils, although this has been a key school target for some years.
66. Senior management has also been very effective in setting up systems to monitor pupil performance, in particular, by providing staff with high quality information about pupil performance, added value and relative performance subject by subject. They and the governors make very good use of this data, and increasingly, departments use it to focus their efforts on raising standards. Some individual teachers, however, have not had enough training to ensure that they do fully

understand the implications of performance data for their own lesson planning, and this represents a lost opportunity. Monitoring is also supported by regular reviews of pupils' work, interviews with heads of subject and the current review of the effectiveness of the pastoral system.

67. Departmental management is generally effective, but it varies from subject to subject. Some departments such as mathematics, art and business studies, have been more successful than others at implementing key school development plans to raise standards in teaching and learning, and to improve school results. The school self-evaluation system picks up and deals with any weaknesses effectively.
68. The management of mathematics is a particularly good example of how, with a range of strategies, teachers can work together as a team and are successful in raising the standard of teaching and learning, tackling key school priorities such as the attainment of boys. The strong team of teachers work well together to plan teaching and generate new ideas. Senior members of the department take their monitoring responsibilities seriously, observe lessons and give good reliable feedback which helps to sustain the momentum of improvement. There is much less of a commitment to team work, for example in science, where recent changes in staffing have brought about some improvements, but have yet to make an impact on the achievement by boys, longer term development planning and using data to improve standards. These developments are needed to give the department a clear focus and sense of direction.
69. The school gives good value for money by planning well how to achieve its objectives cost-effectively. Governors and senior managers are very effective in ensuring that all budgets are scrutinised carefully and that the principles of best value are applied to purchasing and fulfilling school objectives. The cost effectiveness of the sixth form is good as it generates 24% of the overall school budget, but its costs are lower at 22.6% of budget. This is in spite of there being several subjects with small class sizes eg music, languages and physics. In the rest of the school, senior staff and governors have shown the principles of best value in action through extended debate on the school's substantial investment in an information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure. This investment has subsequently been justified by the exceptionally high standards in ICT achieved by pupils and the growing impact on teaching and learning. Financial planning is careful and long-term budget strategies are in place. Priorities for spending are carefully matched to development planning priorities and estimations of continuing growth in numbers.
70. The school has also begun a process of providing all staff with access to subject-based ICT training via the New Opportunities Fund scheme. The effectiveness of the cross-curricular take-up of ICT will be equally dependent on the successful roll-out of this programme and the extension of departmentally based resources, which is now underway. Standards Fund and other centrally allocated resources available to help provide development opportunities for staff and governors have been well used. In particular, the large number of young teachers joining the staff in recent years has been well supported by senior managers. Appraisal is in place in a modified format associated with the supported self-review programme.
71. The school has a well-qualified staff and they are efficiently deployed to make the best match with pupils' needs and the demands of a changing curriculum. However, there is, as a result of a series of promotions, retirements and illnesses on the staff a very heavy reliance on the long-established or relatively new, with few staff in mid-career. Staff benefit from the opportunity to become involved in school policy development, working parties and self-evaluation, and this often constitutes very good personal and career development.
72. The school continues to support pupils with special educational needs well, and there has been continued improvement since the time of the last inspection. Outstanding leadership from the head of the Learning Support Department leads to high quality teaching, a shared ethos and a sense of purpose in the department. Regular, minuted team meetings contribute to this. Pupils feel at home in the department whether in lessons or at lunchtimes. They are listened to and helped when they have problems or want an understanding ear. There are good guidance notes for the department and for the school as a whole. Training is provided for newly qualified teachers and for Key Stage 3 and 4 teachers about different aspects of teaching pupils with special educational needs.

73. There is a number of well-qualified specialist teachers with expertise in teaching pupils with specific and general learning and behavioural difficulties. They are well deployed to support where their skills are most effective. Responsibilities are shared and views respected. Monitoring with a focus on evaluating the effectiveness of departments has been part of the school's self-review process. This has not extended into planning for school-wide monitoring to highlight the best teaching and styles of learning for pupils with special educational needs.
74. The team of seven learning support assistants works closely with the teaching staff in the learning support department. Their work is invaluable in supporting individual pupils and classes with learning or physical needs. They are rarely able to meet as a group to further their own development through training within the department. The more experienced members of the team have given time to furthering their knowledge. There is currently no appraisal system for the learning support assistants to help them to identify strengths and development needs.
75. The Learning Support Department is a very valuable part of the school's provision not only in supporting pupils but as a specialist resource for the school as a whole.
76. Since the last inspection, considerable improvements have been made in the accommodation, with the completion of the Dashwood building, the creation of the sixth form centre in the St John's site and the provision of two new laboratories. Science is still not well housed, however, and the continuing use of mobile classrooms reflects the overall pressure on space associated with the growth in the school's roll. The new building, in particular, provides very high quality facilities for art and languages and staff have good preparation space. The available accommodation is well managed and generally well cared for. Displays of students' work enhance the general ethos of the school and the contribution of the art department is excellent.
77. The school has made good progress since the previous inspection. Standards have continued to rise and teaching has improved. Accommodation, though very tight, is now suitable for purpose, although further development is necessary to deal with shortcomings in science and in the quantity of accommodation. Most issues raised by the last inspection have been successfully dealt with, though the question of the attainment of some boys remains high on the agenda, as does the provision for a daily act of collective worship. Within the governing body and senior management, there is a high level of commitment to improvement, matched by a similar determination in middle management. When all vacant posts in senior management are filled, there is very good capacity to continue to improve.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

78. In order to continue to develop this good school and further raise pupils' standards, attention must be given to the following :

(1) Improve the attainment of boys: this was a key issue at the time of the last inspection and is a continuing priority in the school's development plan, but more concerted action planning, short and long-term, is needed to ensure that:

- the best practice in the school, such as that in mathematics, art, learning support and business studies, is shared;
- all staff are aware of the value, whether positive or negative, they add to boys' prior attainment;
- departments have short-term targets and action plans for effective action specific to their subjects;
- departments are held fully accountable for progress in this matter. (See paragraphs 3, 6, 24, 55, 65, 66, 68)

(2) Remove remaining examples of unsatisfactory teaching by ensuring that all teaching and learning is as good as the current best practice in the school, for example by:

- ensuring that all teachers plan more specifically for individual pupils' needs;
- making activities more appropriate to what it is intended pupils will learn;
- training all teachers to have high expectations of what pupils can achieve;
- providing further training for all teachers in how to plan lessons which enable pupils to engage productively in self-evaluation. (See paragraphs 26, 27, 32, 37, 54, 72, 100, 101, 118)

(3) Provision for pupils' spiritual development, by:

- ensuring that all teachers pay due attention in their planning to opportunities for pupils to reflect on matters of belief, values and incorporate these in their schemes of work;
- improving the quality of what goes on in assembly, so that all assemblies promote the school's aims and values and open opportunities for discussion and debate. (See paragraphs 19, 44, 122, 183)

(4) Pupils' understanding of a wide range of world cultures, by:

- considering the examples they offer pupils when planning coursework;
- extending the range of visits and speakers to avoid an over-emphasis on one cultural style;
- using fully the guidance given in the National Curriculum for developing schemes of work appropriately. (See paragraphs 45, 46)

(5) The quality of information, and regularity of access, for parents about individual pupils' progress, by:

- reviewing urgently the timing of parents' meetings;
- using the information gained in previous consultations with parents to formulate alternative ways of involving parents in regular review of their child's progress. (See paragraphs 58, 60)

79. In addition, a range of other issues should be considered by the school. The details of these may be found in the paragraphs of the report indicated:

- provision of a daily act of collective worship for all pupils (See paragraphs 44, 63)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	230
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	147

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1.3	18.7	44	30	5.7	0.4	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
	Number of pupils on the school's roll	1084
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	28	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
	Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	35
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	156	2

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	5

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	35
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	41

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7
National comparative data	9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.6
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	117	98	215

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	79	90	88
	Girls	82	78	73
	Total	161	168	161
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	75 (62)	78 (74)	76 (77)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	31 (20)	53 (50)	36 (38)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	65	93	58
	Girls	78	74	57
	Total	143	167	115
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	68 (86)	79 (80)	54 (82)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	33 (36)	51 (55)	25 (57)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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
	1999	108	83	191

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	48	102	105
	Girls	62	83	85
	Total	110	185	190
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	58 (67)	97 (99)	99 (98)
	National	46.6 (44.6)	90.9 (89.8)	95.8 (95.1)

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

GCSE/GNVQ results		Average point score
Average point score per pupil	School	43 (na)
	National	38 (36.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0	Na
	National	Na	Na

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
	1999	60	67	127

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	14.7	17.4	16.3(15.6)	3	2.5	2.8 (2.8)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.6)

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	23	96
	National		na

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	10
Indian	
Pakistani	
Bangladeshi	
Chinese	3
White	
Any other minority ethnic group	

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	31	1
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	86.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	14
Total aggregate hours worked per week	381

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.2
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	26
Key Stage 4	23

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	3,642,200
Total expenditure	3,452,212
Expenditure per pupil	2,684
Balance brought forward from previous year	189,988
Balance carried forward to next year	131,860

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY OF PARENTS AND CARERS

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1334
Number of questionnaires returned	544

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	26	63	10	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	31	58	5	1	5
Behaviour in the school is good.	15	53	15	3	11
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	17	56	19	4	2
The teaching is good.	16	70	6	1	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	36	46	24	6	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	34	54	7	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	40	52	4	0	3
The school works closely with parents.	14	46	22	8	8
The school is well led and managed.	22	54	8	4	11
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	21	61	10	2	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	16	45	18	5	15

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

ENGLISH

80. Pupils' attainment in the last three years at the age of 11 has been slightly above the national average. In 1997 and 1999, the standards of achievement for pupils who took the National Curriculum tests in English at the age of 14 were above the national average when compared with all schools. Results dipped in 1998, but were sustained at the above average level in 2000, although girls performed less well than they had in 1999. However, when compared with schools with a similar intake, the results in 1999 were below average. At the age of 16 in GCSE in English, sixty-six per cent and in English literature, seventy-eight per cent of the entries gained grades A*-C grades and all gained A-E grades. Boys performed less well than girls in both subjects; they were below the national average in English, gained few A grades and, for the second successive year, no boy achieved an A* in the subject. Neither the girls nor the boys did as well as might have been expected, given their Key Stage 3 attainment, although girls' performance was above average.
81. At A level, attainment was well above the national average and again girls outperformed boys, who did not do as well as their GCSE results indicated. Although students did not emulate the one hundred per cent B-D pass rate of 1999, this smaller entry of 10 students, compared with 17, gained more of the higher grades this year.
82. At the age of 14, at the end of Key Stage 3, attainment in 1999 was above the national average, but a significant minority of pupils has not achieved the levels predicted by standard tests which they took before leaving their primary schools, and a few boys, in particular, underachieved. This has been the case for the last three years at least. Overall, the results in 2000 were less good than in 1999, with fewer pupils achieving level 6 or above. Both boys and girls performed less well in English in 2000 than they did in mathematics, and marginally less well than in science, with writing being the weakest skill. The school's own analysis of data on standards shows that the point score for the national tests was the second lowest for the last four years for English.
83. Standards of attainment in the work seen were above the national expectations at the ages of 14, 16 and in the sixth form. In relation to their prior learning, the achievement of the lower attaining pupils is good. They are working well and their progress results in standards, which are better than their earlier achievements would indicate. However, a significant minority of other pupils is not performing as well as their Key Stage 2 performance suggests they could. The department is now closely monitoring the performance of all pupils and is developing strategies to overcome pupil underachievement.
84. Standards of reading are generally good: personal reading is developed through the use of quiet reading at the beginning of lessons and the monitoring of logs between the ages of 11 and 14, and through the study of both set literature and a variety of non literary texts at GCSE. The emphasis on personal reading for enjoyment for 14 to 16 year olds and for A level is not as evident as it is lower down the school. Year 8 pupils studying Conan Doyle's short stories read the text fluently, showing good comprehension skills by making deductions, predicting endings and making inferences about characters from the textual clues. Year 11 pupils were able to read a range of exemplar texts critically, provide evidence for their judgements and apply assessment criteria in a disinterested and appropriate way. Pupils studying at Advanced Level courses in English Literature, Communication Studies and Theatre Studies were able to read a range of challenging texts and to respond sensitively and maturely. However, in Literature, whilst being able to understand plot, character and themes, did not always respond to the language used by writers in sufficient depth.

85. The quality of writing varies from very good to unsatisfactory. There is evidence of good creative writing at all stages, ranging from imaginative stories, diaries, personal poems and letters, often arising from the literature texts being studied in class. A Year 8 class studying an Anne Brontë poem were able to use alliteration and onomatopoeia very effectively in their own writing on 'Wind', stimulated by the examples in the poem. Several classes used spidergrams to plan their writing and there is an appropriate emphasis on drafting work rather than re-writing it. Pupils from Year 11 onwards usually make their own notes unprompted by their teachers and annotate their texts appropriately whilst some sixth form pupils refine and copy up notes after lessons in order to present them in a way which will help their learning and revision. Whilst pupils usually write competently for different purposes and in a variety of forms, analytical and critical skills are not sufficiently developed, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, to allow all pupils access to the top grades. Coursework in Year 11 and in the sixth form is thorough and challenging. It reflects the ability of most pupils to respond at least adequately and in some cases with good sensitivity, to literature, including Shakespeare, as well as to be creative and respond to non-literary and media texts such as advertising, brochures and magazine articles. The presentation of written work is variable: pupils do not always take enough responsibility in ensuring their overall technical accuracy. Work which has been word-processed is usually neat but spelling and grammar checks are not always well used to promote the development of the necessary skills. Pupils of all ages and abilities use the school's computers to develop their research skills, and particularly in GCSE classes, to draft and write coursework. A Year 11 group of lower attaining pupils made effective use of word-processing in the writing up of their work experience reports: they were particularly pleased with their outcomes because they were clearly legible and well-presented.
86. The main aspects of speaking and listening are well developed. Pupils of all abilities readily and confidently join in small group discussions and volunteer to read in class. Most can express their views clearly, share ideas, negotiate, solve problems and use talk to develop their own knowledge and understanding: however, many do not listen well to instructions. Talk is well used in many classes to explore pupils' understanding of and reaction to literary texts. The Year 9 class studying 'Animal Farm' had a very valuable and lively discussion on the effect of rhetorical devices, such as repetition, emotive expressions and imagery, in influencing people's opinions and controlling their actions. In the sixth form, a Communications Studies group held a lively and imaginative discussion on how we communicate with machines and how society and industry have come to rely so much on computerised technologies.
87. In most lessons, learning is good or very good. Pupils are interested, usually keen to participate and willing to learn, but there is sometimes too much reliance on the teacher as a provider at all levels. Pupils need more opportunities to think for themselves, to research, evaluate and modify their own writing and work independently. In a topic set Year 10 lesson, pupils responded well to the challenging task of interpreting 'An Inspector Calls' as a mystery detective story, a realist play or a morality play. They were able to make good use of a variety of book, Internet and CD ROM resources to reach and share their conclusions, thus extending their knowledge and understanding of the play and of literary traditions. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in English lessons, where they are well supported by effective learning assistants who plan with class English teachers how to proceed. In several lessons, boys in particular were asked to contribute to class discussions and to read aloud; such teacher awareness of the need to involve boys and to help them make appropriate contributions is going some way towards helping them to become more able and confident learners. Drama, an integral part of English for all 11 to 14 year old pupils, contributes well to learning about language. Pupils' enjoyment of their lessons produced some good learning. Teachers' expectations were generally high and lessons were well planned. A Year 9 class explored some interesting interpretations of the linguistic conventions of several different kinds of writing, ranging from the comic book superhero to factual travel writing. Pupils' enjoyment of their lessons often produced good learning. Teachers' expectations were generally high, lessons were usually well planned and homework reinforced the skills, knowledge and understanding developed in lessons. On the few occasions where learning was unsatisfactory, learning objectives were not clear, pupils were not motivated, the pace of the lesson did not encourage learning and the planning or classroom management were ineffective. In the sixth form, pupils in theatre studies were able to improvise very well and showed originality, confidence and spontaneity when asked to demonstrate

their reading of Stanislawski's writing on 'believability'. One notable feature of all the drama lessons was the way in which pupils were able to evaluate both their own and others' performances, applying the assessment criteria to suggest how performances could be improved.

88. The quality of teaching varies from very good to poor. Well over half of the lessons observed were good or very good. The best lessons had appropriate learning objectives and the skills and understanding necessary to achieve them were developed well through a wide range of interesting activities. Also in these lessons, teachers made good use of the pupils themselves as valuable learning resources and showed flexibility in their approaches according to the pupils' needs. This was particularly evident in the Year 10 lesson on Pauline Duffy's poem *Valentine* as the teacher asked pupils to examine their own experiences and their reactions towards being presented with an onion as a token and symbol of love. In the unsatisfactory lessons, objectives were unclear, there was some poor classroom management and pupils were not well motivated by the teaching. Whilst the lower and middle ability pupils often found the work challenging, the highest attainers would have made even more progress if they had been provided with a range of extension activities. Although there was evidence that teachers were using strategies to enable boys to be more successful, such strategies need to be further developed and employed in every lesson. Most of the written work is marked and assessed regularly and pupils are given useful advice on how they can improve, but there are occasionally some inconsistencies within the department. Many teachers at all key stages follow the very useful practice of sharing assessment criteria with their pupils and encouraging self and peer assessment. The marking of work is usually positive and encouraging but it does not always indicate a clear way forward for pupils to improve. There is some setting of pupils' improvement targets, but these are sometimes inadequate because the targets do not state clearly enough what needs to be done to improve, how and when it is to be done or how it is to be assessed or measured. Identification of pupils' weaknesses and planning strategies to overcome them is still not consistent in all the teaching. The teaching in drama and theatre studies is good and is both imaginative and stimulating. Pupils are able to respond well to stimuli provided through well planned teaching in a variety of creative and impressive ways. The Year 10 group which turned the poem 'Bedsit Suicide' into a sensitive and convincing presentation used language and gesture very convincingly and carefully orchestrated both to evoke tension and pathos. Boys in particular were encouraged to reflect on their created characters and to ensure that they remained in character even when the audience's attention was not focused on them.
89. There is full coverage of the National Curriculum and examination syllabuses in the sixth form and this is reflected in the new departmental schemes of work and lesson units. Departmental planning, though thorough, for example with the development of useful booklets of teaching strategies, does not identify a number of important aspects of the subject. These include the department's contribution to the spiritual, social, moral and cultural awareness of pupils or how to make work match pupils' learning needs more precisely. In particular, schemes do not adequately address the planning teachers' need to improve the attainment of boys and to stretch the most able pupils.
90. The department is soundly led and well organised and resourced. It has a good mixture of experience and new staff with a commitment to improve pupils' performance in English. Together this team is now developing a shared view of the department's role in improving pupils' learning, and that of boys in particular. It is also taking a more active role in promoting literacy throughout the school. Monitoring of teaching and of pupils' work is still not sufficiently rigorous to ensure the highest standards in both. Strategies for the improvement of pupils' performance, and that of boys in particular, are now in place and they too need to be carefully monitored.
91. Since the last inspection, the department has made some improvements, and in particular, the provision of a new departmental base has provided an impetus for further change. The new English resource centre has given a physical focal point for the department. There is still some underachievement amongst higher attaining pupils, as there was in 1995, and boys are still not performing as well as girls.

MATHEMATICS

92. On entry to the school, pupils' attainment in mathematics is slightly above the national average, though the proportion of pupils attaining the highest levels is about average. Results in tests at the end of Year 9 are well above average, and this represents good progress, even though the results are very slightly below similar schools. Results have been consistent since 1996, but each year since 1997 boys have done less well than girls.
93. Pupils make good progress during their GCSE course and GCSE results are well above the national average and in line with those of similar schools. Results each year since 1998 are significantly better than they were previously, though they declined slightly between 1998 and 2000. Both boys and girls do significantly better in mathematics than their average performance in other subjects, but more girls achieve A*-C grades than boys. Only a very small number of pupils achieve A* grades. Results in A-level mathematics are well above the national average. There has been a significant improvement from 1998 onwards, with over half the candidates getting A and B grades. Students make good progress from GCSE to A level.
94. Standards in lessons and work seen were in general in line with the examination results, though a little lower in those GCSE lessons where there was less skilled teaching. In Years 7 to 9, standards are generally above average. The most able pupils develop good skills of reasoning and discover mathematical rules for themselves, though they sometimes have difficulty rearranging formulae and occasionally boys underachieve due to a lack of effort. The majority of pupils makes good progress in all areas of mathematics and use computers confidently. The less able pupils make good progress on statistics and use it to analyse real data, but some make slow progress with arithmetic skills such as subtraction and ratio. Pupils' numerical skills are practised but they do not always get enough opportunities to learn from their errors.
95. Standards in GCSE classes are above average, though few pupils have a good understanding of work at the highest level. Able pupils become competent with algebraic techniques but only a minority understand geometric theorems fully enough to reason confidently in more complex problems. Most pupils make good progress, helped by a well-organised syllabus and clear revision notes and, where teaching is most effective, average pupils achieve accurate work at a sophisticated level. In those lessons where teachers' expectations are high, many less able pupils make good progress with number, such as calculating percentage increases and decreases, but when expectations are lower and work less closely monitored their progress is only satisfactory.
96. In the A-level course, work is above average and progress generally good. Students use mathematical notation correctly. Higher attaining students achieve a good understanding and are able to explain their methods quite clearly. There are, however, few A-level students who are fully secure when manipulating more complex algebra. Students who are less well prepared for A-level because they have done Intermediate GCSE follow a special preparatory course and these students reach a satisfactory standard in pure mathematics.
97. Pupils are generally able to cope with the numerical demands of other subjects though there is no co-ordinated approach to the teaching of numeracy throughout all subjects. In geography they are introduced to grid references and they present numerical data using a variety of graphs, with increasing sophistication and accuracy as they proceed through the school. Science teaching does not actively promote numeracy but in preparing for GCSE pupils organise and present data and manipulate formulae with the help of a calculator. In design and technology they measure accurately, calculate the nutritional value of foods and use mathematics in programming computers to control events.
98. Pupils have good attitudes to mathematics: they generally enjoy lessons, almost always behave well and they feel they make progress. When they are well managed, they work well in pairs and groups. There is a tendency for boys to be rather loud – they are keen to be involved, but they sometimes call out answers – whereas girls tend to be quiet and reluctant to answer. This needs

careful class management and occasionally boys are silly to the detriment of progress. The most able pupils ask intelligent questions, solve problems independently and are active thinkers. Sixth Formers, when well taught, are active motivated learners, but they can also be passive when teaching is uninvolving.

99. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. GCSE and A-level results have improved significantly since 1996. Teaching is better, with a clear improvement in the quality of marking, which is now almost always consistent and helpful. Classroom control and relationships are good and low expectations of pupils reduced, though still evident very occasionally. The use of group work in lessons has been actively developed, though the quality of classroom discussion could still be improved in some lessons. The monitoring of teaching is much improved, and is now an integral feature of departmental management. The monitoring of pupils' learning remains an area for further development, though some departmental projects have begun to develop good practice. The leadership of the department and the development of new ideas in teaching and management have also improved since the last inspection.
100. Teaching is in general good, demonstrating very good subject knowledge, thorough planning and a good level of care for pupils, including regular and helpful marking of work. Teaching is very occasionally unsatisfactory due to low expectations of what pupils can achieve and poor skills in devising effective methods. Ninety-five per cent of the teaching seen was at least satisfactory, more than half was good or better and one sixth was very good.
101. Features of the good and very good teaching included clear explanation and skilful questioning which explored pupils' methods and used their thinking to help the learning of the whole class. Good management of pupils led to both boys and girls making good progress. Resources were well-organised and used effectively to enable pupils to work together in pairs and groups. Pupils were helped to evaluate their own progress and to become active learners. A notable feature of the good teaching is a consistent effort to think of new ideas in order to make lessons interesting. There is good planning for pupils with special needs and in the Year 7 mixed ability classes, teachers and support assistants work well together to plan appropriate work which ensures pupils with special needs make good progress.
102. Where teaching was less effective, weaknesses included a lack of skill in constructing learning activities, where, for example, geometric theorems were learned without understanding, or units of measurement taught without any appropriate application. In some lessons learning was not as deep as it could be because teachers' questioning was superficial and there was too much tolerance of boys' calling out answers, leading to a lower level of concentration and insufficient structure for boys to achieve well. Occasionally teachers do not expect enough of pupils and on occasion pupils' errors were not diagnosed or corrected. Teachers need further training in the use of the National Numeracy Strategy, and in the skilful use of recapitulation at the end of lessons.
103. The curriculum is generally well organised, providing support for teachers and aiding good progress for pupils. Information Technology is successfully incorporated into the curriculum for younger pupils and further development is planned to use IT to support GCSE courses. A departmental initiative to raise GCSE standards has been successful through co-operative planning by teachers and by providing borderline pupils with additional attention. The department supports pupils' social and moral development by promoting good relationships and providing opportunities for group work. There is at present, however, very little focus on the spiritual and cultural dimensions of learning mathematics. Pupils with special educational needs are well supported through joint planning by the class teacher and the Learning Support Department. Gifted pupils are provided additional opportunities for mathematical challenge through masterclasses and a range of mathematical competitions.
104. Teachers are successful in supporting the development of pupils' literacy. They regularly teach the vocabulary used in mathematical topics and provide support for pupils in writing up coursework. Plans to implement the National Numeracy Strategy are at an early stage. Pupils receive regular practice with mental and written methods of calculation, though not in every lesson and there is not as yet a whole school policy for numeracy.

105. The new Key Skills course for Sixth Form students in the Application of Number is unsatisfactory. Timetable problems result in students being unable to attend all lessons. The intention of the course is that students should learn to apply mathematical skills in realistic situations, but because of poor planning, in some lessons students repeat GCSE work with no application or any obvious purpose.
106. Assessment is well organised and pupils are tested regularly. There are plans to build a central database of the results, but at present there is insufficient formal monitoring of pupils' progress.
107. The department is very well led, using strategies that are successful in raising the standard of teaching and learning. There is a strong team of specialist teachers who work well together to plan teaching and generate new ideas. Teachers are well supported through good teamwork, well-structured meetings and a formal system of mentoring by the more senior members of the department. The department is innovative in its use of projects, such as one to raise the standards of borderline GCSE pupils and another to monitor the homework of younger pupils. The head of department is very active in evaluating the work of the department, has an accurate view of its strengths and weaknesses and active in making improvements. Teaching is monitored regularly through well-organised lesson observation and checks on pupils' written work. Mathematics classrooms are very pleasant and provide a good learning environment, though computer facilities are rather limited.
108. The department is active in self-improvement and has appropriate priorities for development. In order to improve further it should now concentrate on raising the performance of boys, through high expectations of work, class management and structured learning activities. It should improve the teaching of numeracy, by implementing the National Numeracy Strategy, co-ordinating the teaching of numeracy in other subjects and improving the sixth form course in Application of Number and developing further teachers' questioning skills and their ability to translate learning objectives into effective teaching methods.

SCIENCE

109. Pupils join the school in Year 7 with above average attainment in science. Generally, they make satisfactory progress. By the time they were 14 in 1999, pupils reached standards in the national tests that were well above the average standard for all schools and in line with that for similar schools. Over the four years up to 1999 the trend in attainment has been similar to that seen nationally. During these years, both boys and girls performed well above their respective national averages, though there was some underachievement by boys compared with the national picture. In 2000, based on the school's predictions from the Year 6 tests in primary school, Year 9 students did not do quite as well as expected in the national tests. The results were well above average compared with all schools, but below the average for similar schools. Boys did relatively better than did girls.
110. In 1999, the GCSE result was above the national average, though not as good as that achieved by the school in 1998. In 1999, 55.7% of pupils gained grades A*-C compared with 48.0% nationally. Every one of the high proportion of pupils entered at the school for double award science achieved a pass, compared with 98.1% nationally. Whereas boys did slightly better than their national average, girls significantly outperformed both girls nationally and also the boys at the school. In 2000, results dipped further from the 1999 position, with only 43.5% of pupils reaching grades A*-C and 97.9% grades A*-G. Again girls did better than boys, though by a smaller margin than in the previous year. Pupils in the lower half of the ability range achieved relatively better than did the more able pupils, both boys and girls, indicating that the lowering of overall GCSE performance was due mainly to underachievement by more able pupils.
111. The number of pupils who study the four advanced level science subjects varies from year to year. In 2000, the pass rate in biology by a large group of pupils was similar to the national average, and was well above average in 1999. In 1999, all of the small number of pupils who entered for chemistry and for physics passed, with high proportions achieving the top grades. A high pass rate was also achieved in 2000 in chemistry, but not in physics. All pupils passed geology in 2000, with more than half achieving the top two grades. Other than in geology, results in 2000 were not as good

as might be expected in relation to predictions based on pupils' GCSE results, pointing to some underachievement. However, underachievement by one student can have a disproportionate impact on the overall picture, due to the small numbers involved in these courses.

112. Based on the evidence gained from observing a sample of lessons and from examining pupils' work, overall achievement in each year group is satisfactory, but there are some variations, mainly in Years 10 and 11. The majority of pupils throughout the school are making satisfactory progress but a minority of boys do not achieve as well as they could, due to lack of effort particularly with written work and, sometimes, to unsatisfactory or poor behaviour. More able pupils, both boys and girls, are not always provided with challenging enough work and resources and so do not progress as far and as fast as they could: teaching does not pay enough attention to the range of ability within classes. Pupils with special educational needs sometimes achieve well, particularly when they are in smaller classes and have additional teaching or support. However, when their special educational needs relate to behavioural difficulties, and teaching is not effective in managing their behaviour, pupils underachieve. When teaching is particularly good, pupils make significant gains in understanding and achieve well: they are challenged to think carefully about their work and they respond with enthusiasm to the stimulating lessons.
113. In terms of their attainment, pupils presently in Year 9 are working at an overall above average standard in relation to the national expectation. In Year 11, there is a wide range of attainment relative to GCSE standards nationally, though pupils are on track to reach overall average standards. Pupils in Year 13 studying for the advanced level science subjects are mainly on course to gain pass grades, with a significant minority currently working at the highest grade levels.
114. The quality of the sample of teaching observed during the inspection, judged by its impact on pupils' learning, was satisfactory overall, and varied from unsatisfactory to very good. It was better in the sixth form than in Years 7 to 11. A wider range of teaching quality was found in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9 where the teaching was more uniformly satisfactory. Teaching in Years 10 and 11, as did pupils' learning, ranged from very good to unsatisfactory.
115. In the best teaching pupils are told what they are expected to learn during the lessons and how this builds on previous work. However, this is far from being generally the case, a weakness also found at the previous inspection. These good lessons start with a thorough revision of earlier work through careful questioning that makes pupils think and establishes what they know, understand and can do. But too many lessons start with almost no attempt to make links with previous work or questioning is allowed to be dominated by the same few pupils, usually boys. In the best teaching, scientific language is used accurately during clear and well-paced explanations of new material. Suitable resources are used to illustrate what is being taught so that pupils develop their understanding, as well as their knowledge. In these lessons, pupils ask pertinent questions that show they are thinking about the work. Lessons usually begin punctually and little time is lost from teaching and learning. The well-organised team of laboratory technicians contributes effectively to the prompt starts to practical work. In the best lessons, homework tasks are set before the end of the lesson so that pupils receive sufficient instruction on what is expected.
116. Insufficient attention is paid in some teaching to the skills of scientific enquiry, with the result that pupils' understanding and skills are not developing as well as is their knowledge. Even in practical investigations, the work is not based firmly enough on testing hypotheses. This contributes to the superficial nature of much of the routine written work. Teaching expectations are too low on the quality and extent of pupils' written work so that science is making insufficient contribution to the development of pupils' literacy skills. Marking of pupils' work often is lacking or unhelpful, with spelling errors, for example, often left uncorrected, though some marking is better than this and provides pupils with guidance on how to improve. Where teaching is satisfactory or better, pupils' behaviour is well managed so that they get on with their work. However, some teaching is not effective in getting pupils' full attention and co-operation; consequently, they do not learn as well as they could. Pupils, especially in Years 7 to 11, do not have ready access to reference materials so that they can develop note-taking and other independent learning skills – there is much copying or use of worksheets and little else for pupils to use to support their homework assignments.

117. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in science lessons are generally good, though they are more variable at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. Sixth form pupils demonstrate good or very good attitudes to their work. The great majority of pupils throughout the school, both boys and girls, behave well in science lessons, enjoy the work and try their best. Many pupils concentrate well and make a good effort to learn. But some pupils, boys much more often than girls, make insufficient effort, particularly with written work, and are too easily satisfied with doing the minimum or with leaving work unfinished. Pupils are generally good at working together in groups during practical work, sharing tasks and resources. In this way science contributes to pupils' social development.
118. During the time since the quite recent appointment of the head of department, a number of improvements have been put in place. For example, some of the science accommodation on one of the sites has been improved, though much remains drab, and the amount of technician support enhanced. The latter was a weakness noted at the time of the previous inspection. Planning for teaching and for assessing pupils' progress is being developed further. Resources for ICT have been extended but much more needs to be done to ensure that pupils are able to apply ICT skills in science. More attention is being paid to revision strategies and examination preparation. More needs to be done, however, to bring GCSE standards back to where they were in 1998 by tackling some underachievement among more able pupils, particularly in the more mixed ability sets, and among boys. Weaknesses in teaching need to be remedied, with expectations of pupils raised in a number of respects, especially the development of their understanding and skills, as well as their knowledge. Greater emphasis on the quality and extent of their written work and access to reference materials and to ICT resources are an essential part of this. Improvement since the previous inspection in maintaining higher levels of GCSE success has not been satisfactory. The leadership and management of the department need to be more effective in raising standards overall and particularly at GCSE.

ART

119. In recent years, the art department has had an outstanding record of success in GCSE and A level examinations, consistently attaining results well above the national averages, including a particularly successful A level art textiles course. There has been notable success in the attainment of boys at GCSE with over 90 per cent of boys attaining A*-C grades compared to only 50.5 per cent of boys nationally. At A level, pupils have attained 100 per cent A-C grades for several years. On entry to the school pupils' levels of attainment are around the expectations for their age. They make good progress and, by the age of 14, the majority are attaining standards above national expectations. Pupils taking GCSE art go on to make excellent progress over the two year course and are taught to produce paintings of outstanding quality. Pupils studying A level continue to make excellent progress in maintaining the very high quality of work while developing a more personal style and imagery.
120. In the lessons seen' pupils achievement was good overall and very good in the 6th form. By the age of 14, pupils are demonstrating a very good control of tone and composition in their observed and developed pencil drawings. The more able pupils show good variety in the quality of line and texture. Pupils of all abilities are making very good progress in understanding colour through a systematic exploration of colour combinations. By the age of 16, these skills are refined to a very high standard and applied in long term projects based on complex installations and collections of objects. Pupils of this age are accepting the influence of a good range of contemporary artists, though only the more able pupils retain significant contextual information about the artists. By the age of 18, pupils are developing very individual approaches to their work through extensive sketchbook studies. They make very good progress in refining the original concepts of their work and they are able to build layers of meanings into the images they create. In studying and evaluating the work of other artists, they are able to make firm connections and comparisons with artists from different times and places. For example, one girl was clearly enjoying the challenge of evaluating an extremely popular illustrative artist against other painters of light and was able to explain, lucidly and convincingly, her findings. The standards of work produced for A level are outstanding in the quality of technique and maturity of content displayed. Throughout the age range, teachers make good use of opportunities to develop the quality of language used and encourage an

expressive, descriptive vocabulary as well as the use of specific terms. This led to success in an 'exhibition review' writing competition held by the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford where the concise, evocative work by Magdalen College School pupils won the 10-13 Years section and was highly commended in the 14-18 Years section.

121. The quality of teaching in the lessons seen was good overall in all key stages though several examples of very good and excellent teaching were also seen. The very strong subject knowledge held by the staff of the department gives an underlying confidence of delivery, which, in turn, transfers confidence to the pupils. Pupils and pupils at all levels respond well to the firm insistence on good behaviour and high standards of work, which are expected throughout the department. Very effective combinations of individual, group, and whole class teaching were used to give pace and structure to lessons for pupils aged 11 to 16 years. Praise and positive comments and the high quality of the individual guidance given to pupils were features of the teaching in most lessons seen. On occasions, however the individual support became too extensive allowing the rest of the class to become less focussed in their work. With 11 to 14 year olds, the teachers use a closely directed style of teaching to enable pupils to learn specific skills quickly and efficiently. With 14 to 16 year olds, there is greater use of individual tuition as pupils apply their skills over longer projects. Teachers are careful to modify the level of challenge and the language used to meet the needs of pupils of different abilities and take particular pride in the successes of lower ability pupils. In the sixth form, discussions between pupils and teachers are on a mature and professional level befitting the standard of their work.
122. The art curriculum includes a good range of appropriate activities and makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. There is a very strong emphasis on teaching the visual language of painting and drawing which derives from the teachers' own skills as artists. A very successful art textiles strand has been developed at A level and plans to develop printmaking are in progress. Three-dimensional work is largely a supporting activity in the form of constructions and installations that are used as source material for further painting and drawing. Direct contact with galleries and contemporary artists is a major feature of the department but the multicultural aspect of art is under developed. There is a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual development through the teaching of art. The dramatic use of lighting on displays of simple objects gives the resulting paintings a grandeur and poise, which lifts them above the ordinary. At A level, pupils develop a distinctive personal imagery through a process of reflection and refinement of their ideas. Pupils in Year 9 showed energy and excitement as they explored the reactions of various colour combinations. The teachers promote a strong moral code with an emphasis on respect for each other and the work of others. They are a caring staff and this underpins the ethos of the department. Pupils' social development is promoted in many ways and most notably in the 6th form studio that, with its complex arrangement of workspaces, constitutes a thriving community, which has a pleasant, mutually supportive atmosphere. The 'Cappuccino Club' initiative also brings pupils and teachers together to work in an informal situation with a positive effect on relationships in class. Pupils' cultural development is promoted through the depth of study of contemporary British art that goes beyond the purely visual and involves pupils in considering the issues and intentions of the artists.
123. While there is no doubting the quality and accuracy of the teachers' assessments of their pupils' work, there is a need clearly to establish standards through the use of concrete examples for the benefit of less experienced staff and possible new members to the department. Establishing benchmarks for the new National Curriculum levels at Key Stage 3 is a priority. The breadth of assessment criteria at Key Stage 3 is rather narrow with too much emphasis on the pupils' practical skills.
124. Leadership and management in art are very good overall. The leadership of the department is excellent with clearly focussed aims and a very clear educational direction. The sharing of skills within the department is a strong feature and staff development is encouraged. The teachers use considerable initiative in funding some of their projects including lottery funding and the effective use of personal contacts. A major area awaiting development is the use of information and communication technology (ICT). While it is used on occasions for word processing and research, the department does not have the facilities to teach this aspect of art. The qualifications and experience of the teachers in relation to the needs of the curriculum are excellent. Accommodation for art is very good, being spacious and well designed, but due to the growing popularity of the

school and the department, it is already becoming too small in respect of the number of available teaching spaces. Resources are good with the exception of ICT for which they are unsatisfactory at the present though proposals for new equipment and staff training are in the development plans for the department.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

125. In 1999, teachers' assessments of 14 year olds were well above the national average. The number of pupils achieving level 6, which is above the nationally expected level, is well above the national figure. Very few pupils attain the highest grades, levels 7 and 8. The school achieved similar success in 2000. A survey of pupils' work and the observation of lessons during the inspection, indicate that teachers are accurate when assessing pupils' levels of attainment. Girls attain much higher standards than boys. In fact, four times more girls achieve level 6 than boys. Pupils achieve higher standards in their making than they do in designing. This is particularly the case with boys, where their design folders are often thin, lack a pride in presentation and contain a significant amount of unfinished work. It is generally this aspect of the work which causes boys to achieve lower standards overall than girls. The standard of practical work is similar in boys and girls.
126. Pupils acquire a good range of skills, using a wide variety of materials between the ages of 11 and 14. They learn to work safely and carefully with wood, metal, plastic, food, textiles and electrical components. They make very good use of computers to support and enhance their work. Pupils make good progress as they move through the key stage. For example, in electronics, they start by learning how to make a circuit, which will make a moon buggy move. By the end of the key stage, they are able to make a much more complicated circuit board, which they operate using a computer program they have written themselves. It responds to heat and light, switching on a fan when it gets too hot, and an alarm when a 'bank' made from a shoebox, is broken into. Pupils develop very competent drawing skills and their graphics work is of a good standard. They are able to produce two and three dimensional drawings using a range of different and appropriate techniques. They understand which types of drawings are best suited to particular purposes. They also use the computer well and use several design packages and the scanner to enhance the quality of their work. In textiles, pupils quickly learn to use the sewing machines and acquire a range of techniques to enable them to decorate fabrics, for example, appliqué, quilting, tie-dyeing and machine embroidery. They learn to make patterns and find out how textiles artefacts are constructed by careful disassembly. In food, pupils acquire a range of practical skills, which enables them to produce finished dishes of a good standard. They develop understanding of the properties and nutritional value of foods. This enables them to make informed decisions when designing food products for particular purposes, for example, healthy meals and cakes for a particular age group. Pupils make some well-finished pinball games in Year 8 using wood and plastic. In year 9, they acquire a good standard of metalworking skills, which enables them to make a balancing, rocking figure with a good level of precision. Overall, the experience at key stage 3 is very broad and prepares pupils well for the next key stage. They realise the need to produce carefully drawn up specifications for their designs. They know that research is important to allow their designs to meet a particular need and they develop their ability to evaluate their work as it progresses, amending it as necessary.
127. GCSE results in 1999 were above the national average overall in design and technology. The results in the different subjects of design and technology varied. In food technology and textiles, pupils' attainment was high compared to the national average. Standards achieved in electronics, resistant materials and engineering were above average, but in graphics, they were well below. The standards achieved in 2000 are similar to those of the previous year, although pupils did slightly less well overall. However, the survey of pupils' work in graphics indicates that current Year 11 pupils are producing good quality work and are clearly on target to achieve at least the national average at the end of the key stage. The percentage achieving A and B grades in design and technology overall is well above the national average. However a much higher number of girls achieved the higher grades than did the boys. This is largely because girls put more time and effort into the written research, planning and evaluating. Consequently they gain more marks than boys for this important aspect of the coursework.
128. Pupils of 14 to 16 years of age become much more competent at working independently. They

make very effective use of computers, for research, to improve their presentation and to analyse and present the findings of their surveys. They use computer-controlled sewing machines skilfully and learn to use computer-aided designing and making equipment in the workshops. Pupils' practical skills are well developed and examples of GCSE coursework in all the contributory subjects show real pride in the quality of finish and attention to detail. The standard of some of the coursework folders is very high in food technology and textiles particularly.

129. In the sixth form, pupils studying electronics and home economics in 1999 achieved standards similar to those achieved nationally in terms of 'A' level pass. However, fewer attained the higher grades than is the case nationally, but the number of pupils taking these courses is very small and it is therefore difficult to make reliable comparisons with the national averages. The observation of lessons and scrutiny of work of pupils in Years 12 and 13 indicates that they are on target to achieve in line with the national average again at the end of their courses. Pupils are well motivated and are working hard to achieve success.
130. All of the teaching observed during the inspection was satisfactory or better. Half of it was good or very good. All the staff in the department have a secure understanding of the subject and they teach the basic skills well. They have also thought about the contribution the subject can make to the development of pupils' literacy skills and each lesson makes a positive contribution. Care has been taken to ensure that displays of key vocabulary are readily accessible in each room and teachers clearly expect pupils to use them, both in oral and written work. Weighing ingredients, marking out and cutting materials, carrying out research and producing tally charts, graphs and pie charts, calculating the nutritional value of food and producing accurate 2D and 3D drawings, all make a positive contribution to the development of pupils' numeracy skills. Teachers are well organised and plan thoroughly for their lessons. They provide clear explanations and demonstrate new skills and techniques competently. Occasionally, teachers spend too long explaining or reinforcing work and this causes pupils to become bored and restless. As soon as these pupils are able to get on with their own work, or when teacher questioning keeps them alert and fully involved, their attitudes improve and they work well. Teachers manage pupils well overall, but they have to work hard to achieve this with a minority of pupils who have unsatisfactory attitudes and whose behaviour is very challenging. Teachers generally make good use of questioning to check what pupils have understood and to get them to use their knowledge and apply it in different situations. When planning lessons, teachers often provide extension activities in order to ensure the more able pupils are sufficiently challenged.
131. Extra support is provided by teachers for pupils who have special educational needs, but there are occasions when they would benefit from different work being set for them, or simplified written guidance, so that they do not lose valuable time waiting for the teachers' help. Relevant homework is set on a regular basis and it makes a positive contribution to pupils' learning. Work is frequently marked and written comments often suggest how they could improve. There is a sensible assessment strategy, which is fully understood by 11 to 14 year olds. Older pupils are given clear guidance about how to achieve maximum marks in the final examinations and when teachers mark their work, they indicate to the pupils what they still need to do. All teachers make very good use of ICT to support pupils' learning and all are secure in understanding how their subject can make best use of the ICT facilities available. Expectations of the quality and quantity of written work required are variable. In the subjects where teachers are most insistent on good quality folders, pupils gain the highest grades at GCSE. The school has already analysed what it needs to do in order to teach Curriculum 2000 and heads of department are currently rewriting schemes of work to ensure the new requirements are fully met. These schemes are detailed and the improved layout and guidelines on time mean that they are easy documents to follow. The school has placed an appropriate emphasis on the development of high quality practical skills and has successfully combined this with the requirements of the National Curriculum. The activities planned carefully build upon what has gone before and ensure that pupils have plenty of opportunities to use their skills and knowledge in realistic designing and making situations.
132. The heads of department are continually evaluating their work and results. Their annual position statements accurately identify what is being done well and what needs further development. The faculty is generally well resourced and well maintained, although the food technology rooms have insufficient cookers for the size of groups and this places a restriction on the activities that can be taught. The department has made good improvement since the last inspection. It has addressed all

the issues mentioned in the last report, but is aware of the need to address the continuing underachievement in boys at both key stages.

GEOGRAPHY

133. Standards of attainment in geography have recently improved and are above the national expectation at the ages of 14 and 16. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected National Curriculum Level 5 and above in teacher assessment at the age of 14 is higher than the national average, with no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls. There are significantly more boys than girls choosing the subject at Key Stage 4 and there has also been an improvement in the recent GCSE results in geography at A*-C grades which have previously been close to the national average. In the sixth form, the standard of attainment is above the national average with recent results at GCE 'A' Level achieving a 100% pass rate.
134. Geographical skills are well developed by the time pupils are in Year 9. Most pupils are competent in basic mapping skills in locating features on the Ordnance Survey map by the use of symbols and the use of appropriate geographical terms. Pupils in Year 7 design instruments for measuring the elements of the weather such as rainfall and wind. Higher attaining pupils can link the measurement to earlier work on weather forecasting to ensure a degree of accuracy in their findings; middle attaining pupils can construct graphs from data measuring rainfall and lower attaining pupils produce similar work with the help of frames. In Year 9, high attaining pupils demonstrate understanding of the Richter scale for measuring the extent of earthquakes. They produce well-structured written accounts of the Kobe earthquake in Japan. Middle attaining pupils rely more on short response answers but provide a well-structured guide on how to survive an earthquake. Low attaining pupils write more limited but concise accounts with the support of writing frames and key geographical words.
135. In Years 10 and 11, 14 to 16 year old high attaining pupils write well structured accounts on landscape patterns bringing together social and environmental factors such as a strong case for the use of some derelict land in Banbury. Middle attaining pupils are equally capable of producing ideas and their work is in line for a satisfactory GCSE grade. The one major weakness is the lack of build up of technical information to make effective comparisons. There is evidence of all pupils making good use of their investigative skills in the coursework assignment on the impact of change in Banbury. Information and communication technology (ICT) skills are used to word process and present illustrations in graphical and diagrammatic form. Lower attaining pupils follow the GNVQ course in Leisure and Tourism, which contains a more appropriate scheme of work for them. Pupils are capable of seeking information and recording details of a visit to the theatre in Banbury. Publicity brochures are designed on the Leisure Centre making good use of computers to produce graphical illustrations.
136. High attaining pupils in the sixth form make very good use of statistical techniques in their coursework enquiries. All pupils show competence in survey work and have attained the written fluency level as geographers that will guarantee 'A' Level grades. All coursework is word processed and most pupils are capable of using information communication technology to enhance the presentation of graphical work.
137. There has been significant progress made since the last inspection report, schemes of work have been thoroughly revised with clear guidelines and targets for both pupils and teachers who are now all specialists. There is more emphasis on enquiry work by pupils in planned lessons using a range of teaching methods. Standards have improved at Key Stage 3 but the use of computers is still insufficiently developed in the scheme of work to enhance enquiries and presentation. Good assessment procedures are now in place with more systematic use of National Curriculum teacher assessment levels directly with pupils which help them understand better what they need to do to improve. Consideration is being given to external moderation to place pupil assessment on a more secure basis.

138. The quality of the teaching is a significant strength of the department as it is consistently good or very good. All teachers have good specialist knowledge and the aims of the lesson are made clear at the outset. Teachers' guidance in the use of textbooks and a good range of learning materials have a positive effect on learning. The best teaching is characterised by high expectations and a brisk pace, as in a Year 10 lesson on the uneven distribution of wealth in Brazil. Pupils were expected to recall information gained in previous years and brainstorm in groups on the various expressions of wealth to be identified in a community. Teachers are aware of different abilities and provide different materials and opportunities for lower attaining pupils and those with special needs. This was demonstrated in another Year 10 lesson where pupils were making good progress and showing initiative in their investigation of leisure and tourism facilities in the area which included access to computers for the production of graphical illustrations. Teaching in the Sixth Form is challenging and pupils cope well with the intellectual content such as seen in a Year 13 class where the teacher skilfully demonstrated the process processes related to the Norfolk Broads with the help of a flow chart. Pupils showed that they had good grasp of the concept and wrote concise accounts under examination conditions of the various measures that could be taken to protect this ecosystem. Marking is generally thorough and consistent. Homework is appropriately set to support learning and the coursework assignments are challenging. There is good evidence of pupils improving their observation skills using a range of sources in researching the ecosystem or on aspects of urban development. There is a good programme of fieldwork, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form to enhance the coursework assignments which are of a very high standard and the Department has been complimented by the Examination Board.

139. The geography department is well led and has made good progress since the last inspection. It has good documentation on all policies and its development plan and teaching strategy reflect the school's priorities for raising standards. Pupils are keen to learn overall and take opportunities to work independently. They work well together in groups and generally remain on task in lessons. Geography has become a more popular subject for boys rather than girls in recent years as reflected in the numbers choosing the subject in the Key Stage 4 options. The delivery of information communication technology in Key Stage 3 has been clearly identified as a need and consideration is being given to the development of more cross-curricular work in Year 9 with a focus on a neighbourhood urban study project. The department is fostering a team approach. There are good resources with three specialist rooms supported by a resource base as the school library is on the main site. The use of alternative accommodation as a departmental office would allow the resource area to be more extensively used by pupils for independent study.

SOCIAL SCIENCE/SOCIOLOGY

140. The standard of attainment in social science at the age of 16 is above the national average, with the recent GCSE results at A* - C grades significantly higher than the national average. In the sixth form, the proportion of A – B grades in sociology at 'A' level has been above the national average and the subject has experienced a 100% pass rate. The proportion of girls to boys is high at Key Stage 4 with a more even proportion in the sixth form.

141. The quality of teaching is good with an excellent command of sociology. Teaching is particularly skilful at exploring pupils' understanding of complex social issues and taking learning forward at a good pace. This was seen in a Year 11 lesson where pupils were considering the methods of punishment in Britain and taking on the role of lawyers advising the Government took a rather hard line on suggesting alternative punishments which may discourage criminal behaviour. In the sixth form, pupils have developed a mature attitude as seen in a lesson when Year 13 were critically examining some of the rituals of alternative religion which included a video depicting self mutilation and snake charming. In course files pupils have acquired good analytical skills in the interpretation of information from a range of source articles.

142. In essay writing there is a tendency for pupils to restrict their own views to the short conclusion rather than weave them into the sociological study. The portrayal of women in mass media provided an opportunity for high attaining pupils to give a more balanced opinion. Only a minority of the pupils use computers to word process their assignments which inhibits redrafting.

HISTORY

143. Results at GCSE in history have been consistently above the national average in recent years and in 1999 nearly three quarters of the candidates achieved grades A*-C. Boys' performance was in line with the national norm but the girls' results were well above. Pupils did as well in history as in the average of all their other subjects. This year the results were not as high and girls' performance dropped to just seven percentage points above the boys. At A level, the school has maintained a 100% pass rate over the past five years but no grade As. In 1999 the average points score of candidates was similar to the national average but only one of the eight pupils achieved a grade B. This year three out of ten candidates gained grade Bs and the average points score has improved. Pupils have achieved their target grades.
144. At Key Stage 3 attainment is above national expectations but not to the extent suggested by the teacher assessments at the end of the key stage. Pupils demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of the periods they are studying in lessons and are making good progress in developing the skills of historical enquiry and analysis of source material. In a lesson on poor relief in Victorian times, for example, Year 9 pupils were able to make reasonable inferences from the sources as to why people entered the workhouses and the attitude of the authorities towards anyone who complained about their treatment. Pupils are achieving a good standard of written work on the 'core tasks' that have been introduced in Year 9 to standardise assessment procedures. For example, pupils have produced thoughtful obituaries on the life of Richard Arkwright, evaluating his importance as an entrepreneur. Teachers are providing clear guidelines for these assignments, to enable all pupils to write full answers, but it is not plain to them what they have to do to achieve the appropriate levels of the history Attainment Target for each core task. Some of the imaginative exercises observed in Years 7 and 8, involving letter writing and script writing have only a superficial historical content, developing literacy rather than extending pupils' understanding of events and personalities. In some classes pupils are inspired to do extra work outside lessons, beyond normal homework. Year 7 pupils have produced an amazing collection of model castles and Year 8 pupils have compiled guides to Tudor architecture. Subject teachers are working closely with learning support staff to devise tasks at the right level for lower attaining pupils but such provision is not a regular feature of mixed ability lessons.
145. Attainment is above national expectations. Year 11 pupils have produced high quality coursework on Roosevelt and their general essay work is of the same calibre. In lessons on Lenin and the Bolshevik revolution pupils demonstrated good ability in using historical sources for information and evaluating their usefulness and reliability to the historian. They were able to weigh different interpretations of the importance of Lenin's leadership to the success of communism and form their own conclusions. Equally, Year 10 pupils showed good understanding when discussing the relative merits of Hitler's key advisers to determine their contribution to his rise to power in the 1930s. Pupils are keeping a full note record of the lessons and making good progress on the course. Lower attaining pupils in Year 11 are able to make good progress at their level on the Certificate of Attainment course, benefiting from the fact that their support teacher is a history specialist, able to tailor the course to suit their needs. In all the classes there is a businesslike approach to the work and full use is made of the time available.
146. In the sixth form, attainment is in line with course expectations. Pupils' files show detailed coverage of the course, following the study guides provided by their teachers. Good progress towards A level is evident in the improving quality of pupils' essays, which include references to historical scholarship, indicative of wide reading around a topic. The level of debate in the group is disappointing, considering the level of understanding shown in written work. Excellent teacher guidance over coursework is producing a high standard of work. In Year 12, pupils on the AS course are making a thorough study of documents on Nazi Germany and researching background topics to deepen their understanding of the historical context. They are making good progress.
147. The quality of teaching is good overall and consistently so at Key Stage 4. Teachers combine good subject knowledge with expertise in preparing pupils for external examinations. For example,

an A level revision lesson on the Great Reform Act was a model of its type, using a range of activities to cover factual information and analysis of party policies, and culminating in note answers to specimen questions. Some of the diagnostic feedback on pupils' essays is excellent, giving clear guidance for improvement. Teachers make the subject enjoyable and topical, in one lesson by using a television quiz format to decide who was Hitler's weakest link. As a result, most pupils find the subject interesting and behave well in lessons, listening carefully and concentrating on their work. In a few lessons there is an imbalance between teacher exposition and pupil activities, with a loss of variety. Lesson planning is thorough, setting learning objectives and devising appropriate activities to achieve them. Teachers manage their pupils well, to achieve the intended learning, using techniques for positive reinforcement of appropriate behaviour with any pupils who have difficulty observing classroom rules. Pupils are making use of home computers for assignments, but, as yet, teachers are still at the stage of exploring software packages that will allow them to make use of information technology in lessons.

148. The school's process of self-review is a very effective system for highlighting strengths and weaknesses in the department's work and has led to careful targeting of the development plan for history. Appropriate action has been taken to improve the performance of boys in Key Stage 3, taking the opportunity of changes in the National Curriculum to carry out a radical overhaul of the schemes of work to meet their needs. The introduction of a wider range of standardised assessment tasks is improving teachers' ability to monitor boys' progress and the accuracy of the end of Key Stage 3 levels for all pupils. Such changes are not properly reflected in statements of policy in the departmental handbook, which need expanding. The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection. There has been an improvement in examination results at GCSE, so that they are now regularly above the national average, attracting more pupils onto the course. There is still the challenge of improving A level results at the higher grades. Teachers show commitment to developing the curriculum and learning styles to raise achievement and increase the subject's appeal to all pupils.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) AND GCSE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT)

149. Since the last inspection, standards have been maintained, the hardware and software resource has been upgraded, and the school has significantly increased access for pupils and staff. All pupils receive discrete information technology (ICT) teaching between the ages of 11 and 16, leading to GCSE examination for all, and in the sixth form through Key Skills assessment.
150. By the age of 14, pupil attainment is at least in line with national expectation and frequently above it. ICT is used in researching and handling information. Pupils can log on to the school's network confidently, load and save files competently, research information using multi-media software, enter and manipulate data and prepare simple presentations. The majority of pupils in this key stage demonstrate confidence and competence in the application of generic software although keyboard input skills are variable. Knowledge and understanding of aspects such as control and measurement are less secure. Many pupils with special educational needs are able to produce ICT work of good quality, but when there are large numbers of these pupils in a teaching group without learning support, their progress is inhibited.
151. By the time they reach the age of 16, the great majority of pupils are entered for a GCSE examination, and the percentage achieving A*-C grades in 2000 was well above the national average for both boys and girls. The performance of girls was significantly better than that of boys. A significant number of pupils, whose grades in other subjects were limited, achieved high grades in ICT. Work observed during the inspection showed pupils building on and extending their skills from earlier learning, including the construction of databases and production of text reports with integrated graphics, tables and photographs.
152. The percentage of pupils achieving A-E grades at A level in 2000 was slightly below the national average. However, the work of pupils observed during the inspection reflected the high standards which many had previously achieved at GCSE and an appropriate level of knowledge and skills for the current stage of the course. The impact of pupils' developing ICT skills is visible in many areas of

the curriculum through high quality coursework and homework assignments.

153. Teaching of ICT is good overall. Teachers have sound subject knowledge, are well organised and enjoy a very good rapport with pupils. They are aware of individual pupil's needs, and use good support materials. Course assignments are imaginatively produced and reliable guidance is provided. Lessons are well planned in terms of structure, content and resources, but greater emphasis on reviewing learning with the pupils themselves would be of benefit, as would more in-depth marking of work print-outs and written exercises. On occasions, opportunities to improve keyboard skills and to educate pupils about health and safety risks associated with the use of computers are overlooked.
154. In all key stages and in the sixth form, most pupils respond well to the good teaching provided. They are enthusiastic about acquiring new skills, and take pride in their achievements, particularly in presentation. Most concentrate well and make satisfactory progress in ICT lessons and over time. Many pupils in Years 7 and 8 have made very rapid progress whereas in Year 9 this is less evident and can be traced to earlier levels of provision and access. In Key Stage 4, pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in developing their ICT skills, frequently beyond expectation.
155. Attitudes to learning are mainly good, although a significant minority of boys in Key Stage 3 lack the concentration or application to move beyond clicking and scrolling and rapid screen changing; some girls in Key Stage 4 were observed to be passively resistant to the subject. For some of these pupils, there is a degree of under-achievement. Most pupils are responsible users of equipment and resources and they respond well to the good teacher role models.
156. The department is well managed and provides very good support to the school in both technical and curriculum leadership. Planning priorities are appropriate and very good progress has been made in the development of specialist ICT courses and teaching in both key stages and in the 6th form. An ethos of strong teamwork exists between teaching and technical support staff. There is a need for more systematic monitoring of classroom activity to ensure the consistent implementation of planned approaches to meeting the needs of higher and lower attaining pupils.
157. Within the environs of the department, resources have been increased and are of high quality. To meet current and future demands, these will need to be extended further, particularly in other subject areas. The appropriate expansion of the resource base, linked to the management of a planned 'intranet' and curriculum support database, will be a continuing priority in order to maintain the high standards currently being achieved. The high investment in ICT resources to date has paid dividends in pupil skill development and examination outcomes.
158. The department, to improve further, should now develop and share strategies for raising the performance of boys at GCSE closer to that of the girls. It has not yet provided structured opportunities for pupils to acquire efficient keyboard and data entry skills through extra-curricular and incentive schemes. There remains a need to structure assignment worksheets more closely to the needs of individual pupils, particularly for lower and higher attaining pupils and to take steps to improve the quality of the environment in ICT areas which are inadequately ventilated

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES – French and German

159. Standards are average at Key Stage 3, but below at Key Stage 4. In 1999 and 2000, pupils aged 14 were accurately assessed at the average National Curriculum Level 4 to 5. Currents standards in Year 9 are similar. The most able pupils in both French and German are on course for above average standards by the end of the year. They are generally accurate in the present tense and can use past and immediate future tenses in extended paragraphs about themselves and their family. Most pupils are at Level 3, speaking and writing in short sentences. Many are in line with expectations for their age, using the present tense in short descriptions and taking part in rehearsed 6-part dialogues. Very few pupils, however, can speak or write unaided.
160. At the age of 16, overall GCSE standards, in contrast to the national improving trend, are still

below average, as at the last inspection. Since 1997 A*-C results for French have fluctuated but remained static, at the national average figure of just below 50%, but in 2000 the proportion in German fell to well below average. As is the case in similar schools elsewhere, pupils perform less well in modern languages than in their other subjects, but by a greater amount than in the rest of the country. Boys underachieve very significantly in relation to their predicted attainment, as did girls in German in 2000. A*-G results are in line with national figures. Current standards in Year 11 reflect those of recent GCSE results. Some pupils, but not enough, are realistically targeted for higher grades A-B. They recall a range of tenses and interesting structures and apply them accurately in their coursework assignments. Most pupils, however, are within the C-E range, not secure enough in writing or speaking to cross the C-D boundary. Pupils' comprehension skills are better because their vocabulary is generally good, but they are weak at understanding and responding to the teachers' spoken language because they do not hear it enough. Many lower-attaining pupils can write and say only isolated phrases and words. The weakest skill throughout is speaking: there is very little evidence of any pupil recalling and using memorised language, and no evidence of spontaneous use. Many pupils are self-conscious and unwilling to respond when challenged. Too many rely on seeing the printed word, pronounce inaccurately, and cannot confidently connect their ideas to speak independently.

161. In contrast, the department achieves good results at A Level, although entries are often small in each language. For example, all nine candidates entered for French between 1997 and 2000 were awarded grades B or C. Results in German have been less consistently good.
162. There has been little improvement in the aspects found to be weak at the last inspection. Modern languages are not popular and although pupils comply and behave well, too many show at best neutral attitudes towards their work. Where achievement is unsatisfactory, principally by boys at Key Stage 4, previous teaching has not motivated them or ensured that they practised skills thoroughly. The very highest attainers remain interested and achieve well on both full and short GCSE courses, but there are too few of them. Mixed-ability grouping in Year 11 is inappropriate for the needs of all pupils and depresses standards. Arrangements in Year 10 are much improved, the provision of setting and alternative courses to GCSE enabling pupils to start to make more noticeable progress.
163. Achievement is starting to improve too in Years 7 and 8. After a slow start in Year 7 the most able pupils progress well in Year 8, for example, in German, placing the verb correctly and forming the past tense, and some make convincing early strides in French, their second language. Most teaching enables pupils to acquire good knowledge and understanding of vocabulary and phrases. As a result, pupils are more motivated and overall achievement at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. Many boys are still underachieving, however. For example, in a Year 8 lower set, boys made very good progress in their paired Battleships game, saying in German in which rooms furniture had been placed, but were disorganised and less willing when required to write. Pupils with special educational needs who are not disapplied for additional literacy support achieve very well in their small groups when they are well managed and tasks are appropriate.
164. There is some good, and even very good, teaching, but it is too inconsistent. Half the teaching is no better than satisfactory because too many otherwise good lessons have weaknesses, some of which were reported at the last inspection. Teaching has not improved enough since then. Teachers have a very good command of the spoken language, but rarely use it throughout the lesson. Too much unnecessary English in all classes sends the wrong messages to pupils who are reluctant to speak. The teaching of basic skills is adequate, with a satisfactory emphasis on listening skills, and the use of specific grammar terms, but it is not planned adequately and marking allows much slipshod presentation. Planning, where it is good, has a clear idea of what pupils are to learn and includes activities, which support and extend learning appropriately. At its best, very good planned use of foreign assistants and support teachers with small groups of pupils is improving learning and progress, and learning resources are used well. For example, in a lower set in Year 8 German, very good use of the overhead projector prompted confident statements of what people can do in certain towns. But often tasks are not thought through, and do not build confidence because they are too long and lack structure.
165. Expectations are often appropriately high, for example in a Year 10 French class where pupils were challenged to listen and respond quickly under strict conditions, and in a top German set in

Year 10 where pupils linked statements using conjunctions without referring to the book. But they are inappropriately low when, for instance, a Year 7 French teacher did not correct basic mispronunciation or allow pupils to read new words from the board, or when homework was merely completing an undemanding written task. They are sometimes unrealistic, as when the teacher expected Year 7 pupils to recall new words from memory when they have not first practised saying them together thoroughly. Marking too is inconsistent. It encourages but is often too bland for pupils from whom far more could be expected. It does not give them enough specific, targeted help, and, as a result, pupils in Key Stage 3 do not know well enough how they are progressing.

Behaviour is usually managed well, despite occasional lessons in which teachers are too tolerant of interruptions and lethargy, but it is in teacher-pupil relationships that teachers' expectations are too often inappropriate and discourage the younger pupils. In French there is still a lack of warmth, which sometimes does not help pupils learn.

166. On the whole, however, teachers' brighter, more encouraging approach and use of praise and reward are beginning to help pupils enjoy their learning, especially in Key Stage 3. Typical of this was a very good German lesson in Year 8 where the teacher's use of a variety of oral games and frequent praise promoted very good learning. Pupils were really excited by the competitive element and keen to volunteer. In classes such as these pupils expect to work and enjoy doing it because they are well taught.

167. It is now urgent that the school ensures that all teaching and learning is consistently of this standard. Teachers need to judge the level of difficulty of tasks better, structure them so that pupils achieve from doing them, and make better use of lesson time. The main priority is to eliminate the pockets of underachievement in oral work at each key stage. Drilling needs to be more thorough, pupils should be expected to memorise and reproduce what they learn to say, and spontaneous use should be encouraged and rewarded. The culture needs changing so that a second modern language becomes a viable option again for 14 to 16 year olds.

168. The department needs to maintain the momentum gained under the good leadership given by the new head of department. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory only since this appointment and underachievement in modern languages is still a key issue.

Development planning is now good and has identified correct priorities, and other processes such as observation of teaching and the use of assessment are improving. The excellent accommodation is an important new factor. Many schemes of work, however, are still out of date and rudimentary, and there needs to be a clearer, more frequent link between routine monitoring and National Curriculum levels so that pupils know what to do to improve.

MUSIC

169. Standards have been maintained since the previous inspection. Between the ages of 11 and 14, while there are exceptional performances, there are also groups of pupils who perform less well and so overall standards are average. Pupils study a broad range of music through listening, performing and composing. Musical skills in Year 7 vary according to experience at primary school but by following a structured course they quickly acquire the skills they need to achieve the expected level by the age of 14. Pupils in the higher sets sing in two and three parts confidently, in tune and with pride in their achievement. All pupils have at least a basic knowledge of notation and this helps them in performance and to notate their composition. With support in class, lower attaining pupils can focus on their work and attempt some of the same work as others in the year although the resultant performance is not so refined. Where behaviour is not well managed, pupils lack the concentration to improve their performance. Girls take their work more seriously than boys and reach a higher standard, but this also has the effect of raising boys' achievement, as in a Year 9 class when the girls added a descant to "This Little Light of Mine". Around 150 pupils including pupils in the sixth form learn a musical instrument and here standards are very high.

170. A higher than average number of pupils take music at GCSE and over the past few years have reached a standard above the national average. Composition is supported by the very high standard of instrumental playing and singing, creating well-rounded musicians. The use of computers for composition enables pupils to hone their craftsmanship and refine and improve their work. Pupils are

knowledgeable about different styles and periods of music and can recognise their main characteristics.

171. At Advanced Level, standards continue to be led by the very high standard of performance. An important feature of learning is pupils' aural development through singing. Pupils in turn conduct a choral piece of their choice sung by the rest of the group. The example of their teachers is very evident in the way they approach this aspect of examination preparation. By the time they reach Year 13, pupils have clearly formed musical opinion and are able to apply their knowledge in critical appraisal of music. Many pupils who do not study examination music both at GCSE and Advanced Level continue instrumental lessons and take part in ensembles and choirs.
172. Teaching is at least satisfactory with the vast majority of lessons equally good or very good. Very good musicianship is at the heart of lessons which both inspires pupils and gives them a good example to follow. This is especially significant in examination groups at GCSE and A Level where depth and breadth of knowledge in music enables teachers to plan work which will help pupils to increase their own understanding. Musical arrangements such as "A Little Light Mozart Music", and "Whose Pig Is This?" for Year 7 are made to suit the needs of individual groups of pupils and which enable all to take part in class music-making. Exceptional musical talent is recognised and nurtured by providing additional opportunities for study. Planning is also very effective in lessons where there is a high proportion of pupils with special educational needs when teachers and support assistants or teachers work in partnership. Because their needs are understood, pupils can have tasks explained to them again in a way which then enables them to make a significant contribution to lessons. There are high expectations of pupils and, as a result, in most lessons pupils leave having experienced music making of a high quality. An interesting feature is singing the register. Pupils' responses are graded and teachers can assess pupils' response to pitch. Other than this, assessment is not regularly used to tell pupils how well they are doing, particularly in relation to National Curriculum levels. Homework is not set regularly at Key Stage 3 to give pupils an opportunity to continue their learning outside lessons and to gain more independence.
173. The department is very well led by an enthusiastic and experienced musician who puts great store by team-work. Since the previous inspection, the music accommodation has greatly improved and is now in a suite of rooms which have a positive impact on involvement and standards. At present there is limited access to new technology before Key Stage 4, but the department is poised to expand extensively in this direction, with work in hand to refurbish the keyboard room and install music software in computers. An extensive programme of instrumental teaching is very well managed and this is the bedrock of the varied and broad extra-curricular work. There are opportunities for pupils to gain performance experience in the informal early evening concerts in the chapel. Pupils take pride in the high standard which they reach as they lead worship and prepare for more public performance. Re-introducing the singing of Evensong in the College Chapel has recently strengthened the link with Magdalen College, Oxford.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

174. Attainment at the age of 14 is at least in line with, and often exceeds, national expectations. Pupils in Key Stage 3 have a good mastery of basic skills and knowledge of the principles of play in basketball. In rugby the boys have satisfactory ball handling skills and a growing understanding of the fundamentals of the game. In gymnastics, both boys and girls have good body management skills and show poise and balance in their movement sequences. The girls are confident in their trampolining and show good control and extension.
175. At the age of 16, pupils' attainment in the games seen at least matches national expectations and in some games betters them. The boys have a reasonable standard of ball control, and have a good knowledge and understanding of the game of football; in badminton the girls have good racket skills. The standard of play in netball is high and the girls move and pass well, have very good shooting skills and a good tactical awareness.
176. With 60.7% of pupils obtaining A*-C level passes in 1999 and 66.7% in 2000 the good examination results in GCSE have been maintained (above the national average for all maintained schools where, in 1999, 51% of candidates passed at A*-C level). Work seen of current pupils

indicates a continuance of these results. The recreational games for the sixth form are optional and the standard is variable, though in the mixed basketball seen there was quite a high level of attainment.

177. Pupils of all levels of attainment, including those with special educational needs, are making good progress in both key stages. Pupils are learning new skills and consolidating learnt skills well; they are developing a sound knowledge and understanding of a wide range of physical activities. The behaviour and response of most pupils in both key stages is generally good, though there are a few exceptions and a few pupils lose concentration and are easily distracted. Pupils have generally positive attitudes and most of them apply themselves diligently to the tasks set. Relationships are good and pupils work co-operatively in groups and teams.
178. The quality of teaching is consistently high in both key stages. The teachers are secure in their knowledge of the subject. They have a good rapport with pupils and classes are very competently managed. Lessons are well prepared and include appropriately structured practices to develop the work. Much of the teaching is direct, positive and effective; in a few lessons opportunities were provided for pupils to use their initiative and take some responsibility for their own learning. Pupils of different abilities are usually satisfactorily catered for by appropriate grouping and individual help, though in some lessons insufficient consideration is given to this aspect.
179. There is very good practice in a Year 7 gymnastic lesson where the teacher's expertise and confident and stimulating approach, allied with an excellent rapport with pupils, gave them confidence to experiment and to take responsibility for developing their own movement sequences. This approach, allied with informed help and guidance, resulted in pupils making good progress in developing their gymnastic movement.
180. The extra-curricular sports programme augments the PE curriculum and helps to raise standards; many pupils, boys and girls, benefit from this provision. The accommodation for PE is very mixed with inadequate indoor provision which, in adverse weather conditions, inhibits the work; and good outdoor provision, particularly the excellent artificial all-weather area, which enhances the learning and encourages higher standards.
181. The department is very effectively managed and led, and the staff, with the newly qualified teacher well integrated in the team, have created a positive learning environment and made considerable improvements since the time of the last inspection. There have been a number of developments and improvements since the last inspection; the quality of teaching and learning has improved, the weighting given to different activities in the curriculum is more appropriate, the staffing has been increased and the department is now operating more effectively as a team.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (RE)

182. 1999 was the first year that the school entered all pupils in Year 11 for the GCSE short course in religious education, and the results were below the national average. Pupils did not do as well in RE as in the average of all their other subjects. The results improved by eleven percentage points this year, taking them close to the national average. Higher attaining pupils achieved a creditable number of A* grades but for most pupils, particularly boys, the standard was still below what they were achieving in other subjects. Girls performed better than boys, gaining twice as many passes at grades A*-C.
183. By the age of 14, attainment is just below national expectations and the standards set by the locally Agreed Syllabus. Objective assessment using the level descriptions in the Agreed Syllabus is not in place yet, so monitoring of pupils' performance in the subject is imprecise. Pupils acquire a sound knowledge of Christianity and three other world religions over the key stage. In Year 9, the top sets are achieving the expected standard. Pupils studying Judaism have a good understanding of importance of the history of the patriarchs for Jewish identity. They are able to find out information for class presentations and projects and organise their enquiries successfully. In other Year 9 sets, in which pupils are exploring Christian teachings on the origins and purpose of life, they are operating at a more basic level, expressing ideas of heaven and hell that equate more with their own likes and dislikes than with any religious teaching. Lower attaining pupils studying the parable

of the Good Samaritan are able, with help, to put the story into a modern version but do not see its connection to Christians' purpose in life. The best learning was seen in a Year 7 lesson on Muslim prayer, where pupils were using direction finders to place prayer mats in the direction of Mecca. The use of artefacts helped pupils to understand the importance of prayer for believers and many took the opportunity to rehearse the prayer positions, appreciating their significance. There are not enough opportunities for pupils to reflect on beliefs and values and what they might offer pupils' own understanding of life.

184. The attainment of 15 and 16 year old pupils is now close to national expectations, but there is still a significant amount of underachievement that stems from poor attitudes to the subject by some pupils, mainly boys. Higher attaining pupils in Year 11 are working at an appropriate academic level, exploring arguments for and against the existence of God. In a lesson on religious experience, they were able to assess its importance as proof of the divine and subject it to rational examination. There is not the same serious attitude to studying religious phenomena in lower sets. This is evident in the superficial level of some pupils' lesson notes and their reluctance to participate properly in lesson discussion of religious issues. Pupils are more positive in their attitudes to debating moral issues. Year 10 pupils are producing some thoughtful work on issues surrounding abortion and euthanasia. Again, it is noticeable that the girls' written work on these topics is more thorough than that of the boys. In general, pupils' investigation of the topics is just adequate for them to acquire a satisfactory level of understanding.

185. Sixth form pupils are not receiving their entitlement to general religious education in the sixth form, but they do have the opportunity, for the first time, to study the subject to A level. A small group of four pupils is taking the subject in Year 13 and a larger group of twelve pupils has started the AS course in Year 12. Standards in these groups are in line with national expectations and their files indicate good progress on the courses. Year 13 pupils have collected a lot of material for their Buddhism course and their essay work shows good progress in analytical discussion of issues. In class, they demonstrated the same intellectual rigour in debating the value and limitations of religious language. Classroom displays of sixth form work are generating interest with other pupils.

186. Teaching was at least satisfactory in all but one lesson that did not advance pupils' learning. It was good or better in half the lessons observed. Teachers organise their work efficiently, devising well-structured worksheets and lesson materials to ensure that pupils maintain a proper record of their work. Lessons are pitched at the right level for the different sets. Teachers are creating opportunities for higher attaining pupils to research information and present their findings to the class, but some project work needs a tighter structure to make best use of the weekly lessons. Close collaboration with support teachers and assistants in the lowest sets is enabling those pupils to make satisfactory progress. Teachers make good use of video and artefacts to promote learning. Class management is a problem with a number of groups, where certain pupils persist in talking out of turn, so that discussion has to be curtailed. Continuity of teaching has suffered as a result of the school not being able to appoint a third RE teacher this term. Consequently, a number of classes have had different cover teachers and books have not been marked.

187. Since the last inspection, RE has enjoyed a considerable expansion in the school, so that it is now a core subject in Key Stage 4 and being studied at A level. Provision for general RE in sixth form is still missing, as is the required school-designed unit of work in Key Stage 3. The teaching team is growing and it will require greater teamwork and pooling of ideas if the subject is to capture the interest and imagination of all pupils, particularly underachieving boys. Assessment needs to be more rigorous and in line with the new levels in the Agreed Syllabus, to raise academic standards and the status of the subject. The department has benefited from a full review of its work under the school's monitoring programme. It is well aware of what needs to be done to improve pupils' performance in the subject. What is now required is a concerted effort to implement the action plan.

VOCATIONAL COURSES

188. The sixth form programme is open access, and the school has successfully endeavoured to ensure that it meets the needs of pupils of all attainment. It provides a wide range of A and AS level

subjects, and in addition, an improvement since the last inspection, a range of GNVQ courses at Advanced and Intermediate levels. Pupils attain standards at A level in line with national averages, and well in comparison with national results in GNVQ, where over 90% of pupils attain qualifications at advanced level over the last two years. In A level business studies, for example, all pupils achieved pass grades in 2000 with nearly 90% attaining the higher grades of A to C.

189. Teaching is good overall, with only one example of unsatisfactory teaching seen. In these subjects, pupils are given much opportunity to develop independent learning skills such as when organising the various assignments needed for course certification such as preparing and carrying out an interview for applicants to a job in a theme park. Lessons are well planned and make very good use of time, with briskly paced lessons. A good example was seen when pupils were drawing up the accounts for a small company. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, the teacher's planning leaves pupils unclear as to what is expected of them. In some lessons, support staff were not effectively used.

190. The last inspection report highlighted the need for the development of more links with the community in business studies. This has been successfully achieved with the introduction of Project Business, Young Enterprise schemes, visits to local firms and individuals, and outside speakers. While individual subjects have sound development plans, the overall co-ordination of vocational courses lacks such strategic planning for the development of vocational courses. The introduction of vocational A levels and the certificate of vocational education will further help to raise the profile of vocational education in the eyes of pupils, staff and parents.