

INSPECTION REPORT

HARRIET COSTELLO SCHOOL

BASINGSTOKE

LEA area: Hampshire

Unique reference number: 223824

Headteacher: Ms A Beer

Reporting inspector: D Klemm
2049

Dates of inspection: 2 – 6 October 2000

Inspection number: 223824

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11-16
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	Crossborough Hill London Road Basingstoke Hampshire
Postcode:	RG21 4AL
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr D Anthony
Date of previous inspection:	2 – 6 October 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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2049 D Klemm	Registered inspector	Equal Opportunities	Standards
			Teaching and learning
			Management
9945 R A Isaac	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development
			Care for students
			Partnership with parents
16782 D M Green	Team inspector	Mathematics	
11044 J N Hedge	Team inspector	English	
		English as an additional language	
3937 J Seed	Team inspector	Science	
4893 P Sellwood	Team inspector	Design and technology (DT)	
		Information Technology (ICT)	
27666 J Dockrell	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
4355 F Earle	Team inspector	History	
		Religious education (RE)	
12470 B Greasley	Team inspector	Geography	
		Special educational needs (SEN)	
19295 P Wall	Team inspector	Physical education (PE)	
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			Links with the community
27665 A Lees	Team inspector	Music	

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Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

The Registrar
Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Harriet Costello School is an 11-16 comprehensive school with 987 students on roll. The students are from a variety of backgrounds reflecting the social composition of Basingstoke. The number of socially advantaged students is above the national average and the percentage of students eligible for free school meals, 3.9%, is well below the national average. There are 0.9% of statemented students which is relatively low although the percentage of students on the SEN register, 18.5%, is well above the national average. The number of students speaking English as an additional language is slightly higher than average.

Attainment on entry is above the national average although there are some variations from year to year. In 1999 82% of Year 11 students chose to continue their education at neighbouring colleges. In recent years the school along with other schools in the area has had major problems in recruiting new staff and has experienced considerable instability in staffing. The new headteacher has been in post for just over two terms.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school provides a satisfactory education for its students. Teaching is good overall but is stronger at Key Stage 4 than 3. The leadership of the headteacher is very good. Standards of attainment are satisfactory and students are well cared for. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- Good teaching in mathematics, science, history, RE, physical education, design technology and ICT.
- The monitoring and evaluation of teaching.
- The very good leadership of the headteacher with the positive support of the governing body.
- The care for students' personal development and welfare.
- The quality of the personal, social and health education programme and the work related curriculum.

What could be improved

- Boys' attainment at Key Stage 4.
- The provision for students with special educational needs.
- Communications with parents about the progress and attainment of their children.
- More support for temporary and supply teachers.
- Provision for spiritual education across the curriculum.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in October 1995. Since then there have been major changes in staffing including a new headteacher. Standards of attainment have been maintained and the quality of teaching seen during the inspection week was far better than at the last inspection. Teaching in ICT and history is now a strength of the school and meets statutory requirements. Although satisfactory progress has been made in improving the intellectual challenge in lessons and developing strategies to enable students to learn more effectively boys and some low attaining students are still underachieving. The school improvement plan is now being monitored and evaluated but is not yet fully costed. There have been some improvements in promoting the cultural development of students but spiritual development across the curriculum is still weak and the school does not meet requirements for a daily act of collective worship. The health and safety deficiencies in science have now been rectified.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	B

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Standards in the national tests for 14 year olds are above the national average but in 1999 were below average for similar schools. Boys' attainment is weaker than girls.

At GCSE standards are well above the national average and above average for similar schools. Results have improved in line with the national trend. Boys' attainment is now significantly weaker than girls. In 1999 results were good in art, design technology, business studies, drama, modern foreign languages, geography, GNVQ, media studies and religious education but were weaker in mathematics, graphics and physical education.

Attainment overall is satisfactory and the school has set realistic and achievable targets for individual students and overall school examination results for 2001.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	The majority of students enjoy school, have positive attitudes to their learning and respond well to challenges. A small minority demonstrate a lack of interest in their work and a few students show a disregard for the school's aims and values.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour in and around school is sensible and, on the whole, mature. There is a tendency for a minority of students to become easily distracted in lessons and this behaviour can be disruptive to others. Students take good care of resources and are sensible when using equipment.
Personal development and relationships	Most students demonstrate positive attitudes to each other and staff. They co-operate well and are willing to undertake roles and responsibilities around the school. Bullying is not a major issue but when it does occur those involved usually respond well to personal guidance and discipline
Attendance	Attendance is satisfactory. Students are generally punctual to school and lessons.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years
171 lessons seen overall	Satisfactory	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.

Since the last inspection teaching has improved considerably with only 5% of lessons now considered unsatisfactory mainly due to weaknesses in classroom management. Lack of continuity of teachers at Key Stage 3 has had some impact on the quality of learning. Teaching is now good or better in 65% of lessons and very good or excellent in 30%. There are no departments where teaching is weak overall but there are weaknesses in some English, art and geography lessons. Teaching is good in mathematics and science at both key stages and is satisfactory overall in English. There are strengths in teaching at Key Stage 4 especially in RE and ICT where teachers have good subject knowledge, use a range of teaching strategies and have high expectations for their students. The lack of continuity in teaching due to staff changes has had some impact on the quality of learning at Key Stage 3 where in a small number of lessons classroom management is weak. The school needs to develop its use of assessment information to plan work for students across the attainment range. A strength in learning is how students develop their knowledge and skills in subject areas.

Students develop well their numeracy skills in mathematics and across the curriculum in science, ICT, physical education and geography. Literacy is less well developed both in English and in other subject areas. The needs of students with special educational needs are not being met effectively because of the limited amount of support available in lessons.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum at Key Stage 3 and a good choice of subjects at Key Stage 4 including GNVQ courses. The quality of this provision is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. Extra curricular provision is satisfactory although the range of activities is limited.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Provision for students with special educational needs is unsatisfactory. There is insufficient support either in classrooms or small groups. The quality of the limited support provided is good.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Students with English as an additional language do not receive extra support in school but are making at least satisfactory progress. The school should make arrangements to monitor carefully their progress as support is available from the bilingual learning support services.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The quality of personal, social and health education is good. Provision for moral, social and cultural development across the curriculum is satisfactory but spiritual education, except in RE lessons, is unsatisfactory.

How well the school cares for its students	Pastoral support for students is good and students feel well cared for and are generally confident that problems are dealt with fairly and promptly. The school is now starting to monitor students' learning more precisely and this work needs to be developed.
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HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The leadership of the headteacher is very good. She has a clear vision for the school and has developed appropriate strategies for school improvement. Other members of the extended senior team work well on specific tasks but there is need to develop further their leadership and strategic management skills. The management of pastoral care is good and many heads of department are starting to shape developments in their subject areas.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body is now making significant contributions to the school in monitoring the implementation and effectiveness of policies. It needs, however, to reconsider its policy on collective worship and to address urgently provision for students with special educational needs.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school analyses carefully assessment information and sets detailed targets for students. The monitoring and evaluation of teaching is good and the school is now setting challenging yet realistic attainment targets.
The strategic use of resources	Although resources are managed effectively the school has not spent all its budget for special educational needs for the last two years. Resources need to be improved in science, English, physical education and design technology. The school improvement plan is realistic and appropriate but it does need to be fully costed so that available resources are used to maximise school improvements.

The school has sufficient teaching spaces to meet present needs although some areas are in need of refurbishment. Staffing is sufficient to meet the needs of the curriculum with the exception of special educational needs.

The school is working hard at ensuring it gets the best value it can from the monies that are available.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children are happy to come to school and are expected to work hard. • Their children make good progress in their work. • The improvements made to the accommodation and the quality and quantity of learning resources. • The friendliness and approachability of staff. • The efforts made by the school to develop 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision for students with special educational needs. • Provision for gifted and talented students. • The quality of information on their children's academic progress and more opportunities for discussion with staff. • Greater stability in school staffing. • The amount of homework set. • Students' behaviour.

mature young people.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Limited range of extra-curricular activities.
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The inspection team agrees with parents that the school has improved since the last inspection but work still needs to be done to improve attainment especially that of boys. When parents visit the school they feel welcome but they have concerns about the amount of information they receive about their children's progress and the number of opportunities to meet subject teachers. This report largely confirms the views of parents about the school's strengths and weaknesses but it does indicate that homework is now being set regularly and only a small number of students behave inappropriately. The school is now developing provision for gifted and talented students. The number of parents' questionnaires returned to the Registered Inspector was 424 and 59 parents attended the consultation evening.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. On entry to the school students' standards of attainment are above the national average. They are stronger in mathematics and science than in English. At the end of Key Stage 3 results in the national tests from 1996-1999 have been above the national average but were below average for similar schools in 1999. From 1996-1999 results have been significantly stronger in mathematics and science than in English although in 2000 results in English were better than in science and mathematics.

2. In English boys and girls attain in line with the national average although boys' results have improved over the last few years. Standards have not improved significantly since the last inspection and there has been considerable variation in results from year to year. In 1999 results were well below the average for similar schools. Mathematics results have been well above the national average and in 1999 above average for similar schools. The attainment of both boys and girls has been well above the national average and results have improved more than in schools nationally. In science results have been above the national average but in 1999 were below average in relationship to similar schools. Girls' attainment has been stronger than boys. In other subjects standards, as measured by teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3, have been below the national average in history and geography and above in ICT and modern foreign languages. Standards in DT have improved and are now around the national average.

3. In 1999 55% of students achieved at least five GCSE passes at A*-C. This was above the national average and in line with the average for similar schools. The average points score for all students was well above the national average and above average for similar schools. Since the last inspection results have improved in line with the national trend although there is an increasing gap in the performance of boys and girls. In the 2000 GCSE examinations 71% of girls and 34% of boys achieved five A*-C grades. Last year, results were good in art, design technology, business studies, drama, modern foreign languages, geography, GNVQ, media studies and religious education but were weaker in mathematics, graphics and physical education. The school has set a target of 63% of students to achieve five A*-C grades and an average points score of 43 for 2001. This is based on detailed use of students' prior attainments with each student having a clear target for each examination subject. These targets are realistic and achievable.

4. The majority of students make satisfactory progress at both key stages in line with their prior attainment on entry to the school. The gap in performance between boys and girls at GCSE is now significantly wider than that found nationally.

5. Standards of work observed during the inspection week were generally satisfactory in relationship to students' prior attainments. In English girls make better progress than boys because they work harder and present their work well. By the end of Key Stage 3 most students can write fluently with a good degree of accuracy and control and are confident speakers in class discussions. At Key Stage 4 high attaining students can write at length and make comparisons with other literary texts but relatively few students achieve the highest grades. In mathematics most students at Key Stage 3 can work confidently with numbers, fractions, decimals and percentages. They use calculators competently and present accurately data in mathematical enquiries. Girls' attainment at Key Stage 4 is now significantly stronger than boys although most students can solve increasingly complex problems and are confident users of algebra and trigonometry. In science students have a

good knowledge of the subject by the end of Key Stage 3 and this progress is maintained at Key Stage 4. Girls' attainment is stronger than boys in science.

6. In art standards in drawing and painting are satisfactory at Key Stage 3 but students are weaker in other aspects of the subject. In Year 10 students' standards in representation of form in two and three dimensions are weak. In DT standards are satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 particularly in food subjects. Standards in geography are satisfactory at both key stages. By the end of Key Stage 4 all students can extract and use information from a range of information. Students in history achieve satisfactory standards at both key stages and by the end of Key Stage 4 can write reasonably detailed accounts of historical events but are weaker in evaluating the usefulness of their sources. Standards in French and German are satisfactory at both key stages but the attainment of girls is well above that of boys. The speaking skills of high attaining girls are a particular strength. In physical education standards are good throughout the school. At Key Stage 3 levels of fitness are above average and at the end of Key Stage 4 good standards of performance are matched by a growing understanding of the part sport plays in contemporary society. Standards observed in a range of GNVQ courses are good. In music standards are variable but are satisfactory overall. Standards in ICT are now very good throughout the school and most students are increasingly competent users of a wide range of ICT processes including word processing and software such as 'PowerPoint'.

7. Many students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress although progress is better at Key Stage 4 than 3. They make good progress in DT and ICT at both key stages and in history and RE at Key Stage 4 where work is matched well to the needs of individual students. Gifted and talented students make satisfactory progress in most lessons and reach appropriate levels of attainment. In lessons they make the most progress in mathematics and science where setting arrangements facilitate more individualised work and there are opportunities to do AS level courses. Students are encouraged to attend master classes in mathematics held in the town. Students with English as an additional language make at least satisfactory progress and their competence in using English is generally good.

8. Although standards of literacy are generally satisfactory across the curriculum the newly appointed co-ordinator has a key role to play in developing students' language skills in all areas of the curriculum. In English standards are satisfactory and some good work was observed in modern foreign languages, history, RE and physical education. Standards of numeracy are good in mathematics lessons and in science, technology and geography.

9. Since the last inspection standards in external examinations and tests have been maintained. Attainment is stronger at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3 and the gap between boys and girls is widening. Standards have improved significantly in history and ICT. There are strengths in mathematics and science but room for improvements in English.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

10. Most students have positive attitudes to school and to their lessons. They come to school willingly and usually arrive in class promptly. When teaching is challenging and there is good classroom organisation, students of all abilities show enthusiasm, concentration, are attentive and work hard. A few students both boys and girls lack motivation, become quickly distracted and tend to chatter. This can lead to a disruption in learning for other students and has a detrimental effect on attainment and progress. Poor attitudes in lessons are generally the result of weak teaching skills and poor classroom management. A small minority of students often demonstrate immature attitudes and show a disregard for the school's aims and values. There is evidence that the majority of students are responding to the increased

academic rigour and intellectual challenge which are beginning to permeate the life of the school.

11. During the inspection week, many students returned to school to help with an Open Evening for prospective parents. A variety of activities were staged and senior students were on hand to welcome their visitors. This event highlights the good response of students to the school's aims and values and the generally positive attitude that the vast majority have to their school.

12. Movement around the large campus is orderly. The vast majority of students are friendly, open and confident when talking to visitors and they respond quickly and politely to the staff. A few students complain of bullying and this reflects the concern of some parents that intimidating behaviour does take place. No incidents of threatening or aggressive behaviour were seen during the inspection and the school dealt appropriately with a scuffle, which broke out between a small group of girls during a lunchtime break. Most students think the school deals well with bullying when it occurs. The large number of temporary exclusions during the previous year was due to a few persistent re-offending older students, some of who were registered as having emotional and behavioural difficulties. The school expects to reduce these numbers this year to a level well below the national average. There is a disregard of the school rules by a few students and there is evidence of smoking in the toilets. Some students are careless of their surroundings and the amount of litter, which is dropped during break, and lunch times is unacceptably high.

13. Relationships between students and with the staff are good. Students show respect for each other and value the contribution of their classmates during lessons. On several occasions students were seen working together in pairs and small groups and there was evidence of good, safe collaborative work in PE and in science. They take good care of the equipment and resources they use in lessons. Many students take advantage of opportunities for responsibility around the school, including the School Council whose members were involved in the appointment of both the current headteacher and one of the deputy heads. The vast majority of students are willing to take responsibility for their own learning and their personal development through homework, independent study and by participating in school events.

14. Rates of attendance for 1998/99 and 1999/2000 were satisfactory although unauthorised absence was above the national average in 1998/99. Punctuality to lessons is generally good although there were several cases of unexplained lateness during the week of the inspection. Attendance has improved since the last inspection and standards of behaviour are starting to improve after difficulties in the last academic year.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

15. Teaching during the inspection week was good. In 95% of lessons it was at least satisfactory, was very good or excellent in 30% and was good in a further 35%. Teaching was stronger at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3. At the last inspection one in three lessons at Key Stage 3 and almost two out of five at Key Stage 4 had shortcomings that affected students' learning. The school has made good progress in improving the quality of teaching particularly at Key Stage 4. There are no departments where teaching is unsatisfactory overall but there are weaknesses in some English, art and geography lessons. Teaching is good in mathematics and science and is satisfactory in English. It is very good at Key Stage 4 in RE and ICT. Since the last inspection there have been many changes in staffing and well over half of the teachers are new to the school. The school has had to use a large

number of supply teachers and has had severe difficulties in appointing new staff. Although the quality of some supply teaching has been satisfactory the lack of continuity of staff has had an impact on learning at Key Stage 3. The generally good quality of teaching observed during the inspection week should now begin to have an impact on students' learning and attainment.

16. Numeracy skills are well taught in mathematics and students are generally confident in solving mathematical problems, using calculators and analysing data. In science students are taught effectively how to measure and record information and data handling is taught confidently in ICT, geography and physical education. The quality of teaching of numeracy skills is at least satisfactory and often good across the curriculum. Literacy skills are taught satisfactorily in English and in modern foreign languages, history and RE appropriate emphasis is placed on teaching key words. In geography students are taught well how to read written texts to extract answers to questions. The newly appointed literacy co-ordinator has a key role to play in developing literacy skills in reading and writing across the curriculum especially in relationship to boys who are not achieving as well as girls in most subject areas including mathematics, science and at Key Stage 4 in English.

17. Students with learning difficulties receive good support from the special educational needs department in lessons but the amount of this support is limited. Teachers' knowledge about the requirements of these students is generally good and is very good in DT and ICT. The use of individual education plans is satisfactory except in English where insufficient use is made of this information to plan work. At Key Stage 4 the key skills and life skills courses are well planned and organised. Teaching is very good and students respond well to the pace of lessons and the high expectations of their teachers. The quality of support for gifted and talented students is satisfactory and is very good in mathematics at Key Stage 4 and in ICT throughout the school. Students with English as an additional language do not receive additional support but when observed in lessons they were making, at least, satisfactory progress.

18. In many lessons particularly at Key Stage 4 teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and lessons are well planned. In history teachers use their subject knowledge to plan stimulating lessons that develop students' investigative skills and in ICT teachers use appropriate learning materials for students at all levels of attainment. There are weaknesses in some art lessons where staff expertise is insecure, some lessons lack structure and only a limited variety of teaching methods are used. Students respond well when teachers' expectations are high as in a Year 11 RE lesson when a group of low attaining students worked hard at extending their knowledge of Judaism but expectations of some students in English are too low at Key Stage 3. In physical education staff use a range of teaching strategies to develop basic skills as in one lesson on the use of defence in games. Mathematics teachers use a variety of methods well to improve basic skills in numeracy and in a science lesson students were encouraged to explore creatively a range of ideas on how to conduct an experiment. In some music lessons the level of intellectual challenge is low and lesson time is not used effectively.

19. Classroom management is good in the majority of lessons and is very good in RE and history. There are a small number of lessons across the curriculum where students and boys, in particular, do not concentrate and their behaviour affects the learning of others. Many of these lessons are taught by temporary staff who have insecure subject knowledge as in one science lesson where students were not challenged by the routine nature of the task they were set. In some English and art lessons indiscipline occurs when the pace of learning is slow and teachers do not insist that students focus on their work. In some Key Stage 3 geography lessons management of students is weak.

20. Homework is now being set regularly and is generally of good quality. Assessment of students' work and the quality of marking has improved with strengths in modern foreign languages, history and geography but some marking in English lacks detail and is negative in tone. The use of assessment information to plan lessons needs to be developed and is a weakness in geography. The teaching of subject specific skills is satisfactory and there are strengths in the teaching of numeracy not only in mathematics but also in geography, science and technology. Although there are examples of good practice in teaching literacy skills in a number of curriculum areas the school needs to focus on developing literacy across the curriculum with a particular focus on boys.

21. Learning was unsatisfactory in 5% of lessons and was good or better in more than six out of ten. There were no subjects where learning was unsatisfactory at either key stage. Students learn very well at both key stages in ICT and at Key Stage 4 in RE and DT and they learn well throughout the school in history, PE, science and at Key Stage 3 in DT, mathematics and RE. At Key Stage 4 learning is good in geography and modern foreign languages and is satisfactory in mathematics at Key Stage 4 and in English at both key stages.

22. There are strengths in learning in ICT where students develop good keyboard skills and improve their understanding and knowledge of different writing styles. In RE students enjoy their lessons, concentrate well and persevere in their learning about different religious traditions. A Year 11 textiles group demonstrated good research skills in investigating patterns and designs from other cultures and in PE most students work hard at improving their skills. In many science lessons the pace of learning is brisk and students are expected to complete challenging activities as in a lesson on how to conduct experiments. Teachers need to develop students' understanding of how well they are learning and what they need to do to improve.

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

23. The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum that fully meets the requirements of the National Curriculum and RE. At Key Stage 3, study skills and PSHE are introduced in Year 7 and all students take drama and ICT which is taught as a discrete subject. Students are offered a choice of either French or German and a taster course in a second language in preparation for options in Year 9. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is enriched for all students by PSHE, short courses in RE and ICT and opportunities to take GNVQ courses. The range of optional subjects offered to students has been effectively extended through provision of separate science subjects and the introduction of work related learning through the well-planned life skills course in Year 11 and key skills in Year 10. Homework is generally well used to support studies across the curriculum and appropriately marked although this was a cause of concern for parents in the previous school year.

24. Although statutory requirements are met at Key Stage 3, an unusually high proportion of students are being disapplied from the National Curriculum to follow alternative courses at Key Stage 4. This is now possible under new regulations but it is a cause for concern in respect of equality of access to modern foreign languages for students, particularly the boys.

25. The provision made to develop numeracy skills is good in mathematics, science and geography. Literacy skills are not as well developed either within English or across the curriculum.

26. The quality of learning opportunities offered to students is good across DT, in the humanities subjects particularly at Key Stage 4, in ICT, media and business studies and in the work related courses. There is some weakness in the quality of experience in English and in the range of activities offered in art. There is a need to improve continuity in science at Key Stage 3 although continuity and progression are effective in history, geography, RE, ICT and DT where schemes of work are fully in place. In a number of other subjects these are being rewritten following the appointment of new heads of department. Curriculum time allocations are appropriate other than for PE at Key Stage 4. Option choices are well organised but there is a low take up for music and the opportunity to pursue a second language is very limited. Teaching groups are organised appropriately to meet individual needs other than in modern languages where the banding of half-year groups works against accurate setting in languages and in English where setting arrangements are unnecessarily complex.

27. Good curricular links have been established with contributory primary schools in ICT and DT but are underdeveloped in other subjects. There is a partnership between the school and the two local colleges through the shared teaching of the life and key skills courses.

28. Extra curricular provision is broadly satisfactory although less extensive than in many similar schools because of the short lunch hour. A particular emphasis is placed on offering students additional study opportunities through after school study groups or clubs. Provision is particularly good in ICT, mathematics, DT and PE. There is an activities week for Key Stage 3 students providing events in school as well as a range of residential experience. A series of enrichment activities are planned for the current term including debates, writing competitions, mathematics enrichment, a puzzle club, a drama production and gallery and theatre visits. There is a regular German exchange visit and geography field trips in Years 7 and 10.

29. Individual education plans reflect the needs of those students with specific educational needs but targets are generalised and not specific enough to enable students and teachers to develop strategies to meet them. The support provided in the classroom, particularly for students with statements of specific need, is appropriately focused on the core subjects but is insufficient. The school is not meeting fully the requirements of all students on its Code of Practice special educational needs register although there are firm plans to do so in the future. There are no arrangements for those students with specific needs to work in small groups or receive individual attention to support those needs through well-structured programmes of work.

30. The school is currently extending its provision for gifted students. A summer school run in collaboration with King Alfred College was held this year for some students in Year 8 and the school itself, under the DFEE guidelines, held its own summer school for able and gifted students from both Harriet Costello and feeder primary schools. This initiative is continuing and further developments include the identification of gifted and talented students in all years across subject areas. The school has no separate provision for supporting students with English as an additional language who make at least satisfactory progress in school. The school should ensure that a senior member of staff monitors carefully their progress.

31. Personal, social and health education is taught to all students and includes lessons in careers education. Both the style of delivery and the nature of the programme have recently been changed and already there is clear evidence of improvement. The teacher in charge of this curriculum area has worked extremely hard to produce and promote an appropriate range of learning experiences across the school. This is supported by comprehensive and detailed lesson plans for use by a group of specialist teachers. Overall the quality of teaching

is at least satisfactory and often good or very good. Issues relating to drugs and sex education are sensitively taught and target-setting processes are being introduced in Year 9 lessons through the use of 'progress files'. The careers education programme is valued by students who feel they are well prepared for the next stage of education and employment in these lessons and through the individual counselling they receive from staff and careers officers. All Year 10 students participate in a well-organised work experience programme and the attention given to the work related curriculum in GNVQ groups is of a good standard. The quality of this entire provision is consistently good.

32. Since the last inspection, curriculum planning and provision in RE, history and ICT have been improved and have now become considerable strengths. Schemes of work are still variable in quality. Work experience is now offered at a more appropriate time in Year 10.

33. The provision made by the school to support students' personal development is satisfactory with respect to moral understanding and social development. The provision for cultural development of students is also now satisfactory and has improved since the last inspection. The provision for students' spiritual development remains unsatisfactory.

34. Statutory requirements for collective worship are not met. Regular year assemblies are held and often present students with strong moral messages, but there is no opportunity for reflection and these events are not linked to any clear religious or spiritual tradition. The environment in which assemblies are held is not stimulating and little attention is paid to creating an atmosphere of quiet reflection and although students are well behaved and attentive, no opportunity for their active participation is provided. Opportunities to develop students' sensitivities to the spiritual dimension of experience are taken in a few curriculum areas, notably RE and art with a project on human rights. Elsewhere in the curriculum little attention is paid to this area of development and teachers do not adequately exploit the opportunities offered by their subjects. Good opportunities are given to students in RE to reflect on significant aspects of human experience and they are encouraged to respond in their own way to questions of purpose and meaning, many doing so with insight and maturity. There has been no improvement in this aspect of provision since the last inspection.

35. Provision for moral development is satisfactory overall. Moral issues are explored through a variety of subjects in the National Curriculum. Students in ICT study a project on computer and credit card fraud. There is good provision for moral development in RE where a range of moral and ethical issues is explored including abortion, euthanasia, poverty and racism. In history issues relating to war and peace, racism and the persecution of ethnic minorities are discussed.

36. Provision for social development is satisfactory and in a few subjects is a strength. Students in Year 7 in ICT study a charity and those following GNVQ in Health and Social Care follow a number of units that refer to social issues. Group work in art, music and drama provide good opportunities to develop relationships and promote collaborative learning.

37. Provision for cultural development is satisfactory. In design technology, food technology and textiles students have opportunities to study different cultural traditions. Drama students visit the Haymarket and other theatres on a regular basis. Exchange visits to Euskirchen are organised by the modern foreign languages department and students in Year 11 research a famous French person. There is also a foreign language assistant in school this year who provides a European dimension to the curriculum. In history students have the opportunity to learn about their own cultural heritage. In RE a range of religious traditions are studied which enhances students' multi cultural awareness. The music curriculum includes music to perform, compose and listen to not only drawn from western culture but from several other cultures around the world. There is, however, no planned

programme of visits to museums or places of historical or religious importance and there are few visitors to the school to talk about their personal experiences.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

38. The school makes good provision for the pastoral care of students and has successfully addressed the issues raised in the previous Ofsted report. Every member of staff has a role to play in the pastoral care of the students and regular meetings at all levels ensure that personal and, to a developing extent, academic progress are monitored and appropriately recorded.

39. There are good procedures in place to safeguard students' welfare and personal safety. Statutory child protection measures are sensitively enforced and students generally feel secure. Effective systems are in place for monitoring health and safety, including risk assessment. However, there is a serious concern over the safety of students outside the school gates, both at the start and end of the day and also during lessons when they have to cross the road to the sports hall. At these times, students are largely unsupervised and unregulated and, although the majority cross the road sensibly, there is a tendency to treat the road as part of the school premises with a consequent relaxation of care. Attention has been raised to this danger and the school intends to take steps to address the issue immediately by ensuring that a member of staff is always on hand to supervise crossings.

40. The quality of personal support and guidance given by class tutors is mixed, due to the transient nature of staffing at the time of the inspection. Students are well supported by heads of year and the assistant head. The effectiveness of tutorial sessions is very varied but the personal, social and health education programme, which is delivered during lessons, is of good quality and ensures that students' awareness is drawn to issues such as bullying and the dangers of smoking and drugs. Students are confident that they will always find a sympathetic ear and their problems will be resolved. The school nurse provides confidential council to both staff and students and the support she is able to give them has a very positive effect on their well being. The school and the National Health Trust fund this post jointly and there are excellent links with all the appropriate services. This leads to issues of concern being dealt with quickly and effectively. The role of the school nurse is a strength of the school and has a major impact on the students' personal development and their welfare.

41. The behaviour management policy includes the way in which bullying should be dealt with and it is clearly presented. Rewards and sanctions are accumulative in nature and success is recognised publicly in a variety of ways. Absence is carefully monitored and good practices, including class registration, exist to ensure that the whereabouts of students are always known. However, attendance registers are not always completed correctly and do not comply fully with statutory requirements. The school has recently appointed a part-time member of staff to keep the registers up to date and to monitor attendance but it is too early to judge the effectiveness of this appointment.

42. The school's clear and well organised staff handbook has detailed policies on assessment, recording and reporting which outline what teachers are expected to do. This has helped to ensure that the assessment of students' work is at least satisfactory in most subject departments, including those with high numbers of teachers new to the school. Practice is good this term in mathematics, science, modern foreign languages, and geography and is very good in design and technology, and in ICT. It is only just satisfactory in PE, and procedures have not yet been implemented in art.

43. The current marking policy was introduced last year and is intended to standardise marking procedures across every subject department of the school. However, it fails to differentiate amongst the attainment of students in setted groups and is a particular concern in mathematics. The school needs to review this policy. At the last inspection standards of marking and the moderation of students' standards of work were criticised. As yet there is no overview of the quality and consistency of moderation and marking and standards vary across departments.

44. There has been considerable progress in the use of target setting and the school now produces data booklets for each year group which are made available to all teachers. There is a comprehensive set of data for each student, beginning with the results of tests at primary schools which are used to set target grades for the tests at Key Stage 3 through to predicted grades in GCSE examinations. This information encourages teachers, students and parents to have high yet realistic expectations for students. It is clear and comprehensive and is an example of very good practice. It enables subject teachers to maintain an overview of the progress of all their students, and to discuss their progress with them.

45. The school intends that form tutors should be learning managers for all members of their forms, receiving information on their attainments across all subjects and providing guidance and counselling as appropriate. There are plans to develop the system to provide computerised records of students' subject assessments throughout the year and to provide a manageable database for ongoing monitoring and support.

46. Parents voiced a number of concerns at their meeting with the Registered Inspector relating to lost or unmarked work caused by the many changes of staffing. The systems the school have introduced to deal with this problem appear to be working but will need to be monitored carefully by heads of department and senior managers. Parents were appreciative of the way in which help was provided for students in individual subjects and through the pastoral system. There was particular appreciation of the recognition of students' achievements through the rewards system, the two prizegivings and the "spotlight" display board. These illustrate the positive ways in which the school is attempting to reward its students and exemplify its supportive attitudes towards them.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

47. The school recognises the importance of establishing and maintaining a strong relationship with parents but the quality of communications from school is variable and some parents feel that this is an issue that needs to be addressed.

48. Year 6 parents receive good information via the prospectus and the school makes excellent provision for them to visit by staging an open evening and three open days. Regular illustrated newsletters ensure that parents are kept up to date with general news about the school and information about students' activities and achievements. The annual Governors' Report lacks some statutory detail but is otherwise satisfactory.

49. Day to day communication with parents is good and the school makes every effort to respond to concerns within 48 hours. The majority feel comfortable approaching the school with problems and feel their children like school. The Parent Teachers Association is active in fund raising with this year's focus on the planned improvement of the playgrounds, but the hard working committee formed from a small nucleus of parents would appreciate more help from other parents.

50. End of year reports are generally good and are informative about progress although some of the target setting is not specific enough and, where staff are absent, there is often no subject report included. The school is making an effort to improve parents' contact with subject staff and has recently upgraded the interim report to include qualitative judgements on progress. There is one consultation evening per year for parents to discuss students' progress and the school is piloting a new approach to this event. At Key Stage 3 these meetings are informal and contact is mainly with form tutors but parents may make an appointment to see subject staff if there is a need. Some parents feel unhappy at this approach and would value the opportunity to meet all their children's teachers. The senior management has this issue under review.

51. A few parents play an active part in the school during the day and the vast majority are supportive of school routines, the dress code and attendance procedures. In music, there is good support for instrumental practice and many parents attend school plays and performances. Most parents regularly sign homework diaries and there is evidence in many subjects that work done at home has a positive effect on students' attainment and progress.

52. Parents' overall perceptions of the school are affected by issues to do with current staff changes and the number of supply teachers the school has had to use in recent years and many of the views expressed before the inspection reflect this. Concern over their own children's experiences are causing some misconceptions and misunderstandings among many of the parents and the school is aware that this is an area which needs to be addressed. A large number of parents were unhappy about the quality of information on their children's progress and attainment and many feel that this lack of information makes it difficult for them to be actively engaged in helping their children to reach their full potential.

53. Before the inspection, parents voiced concerns about staff turnover; the quality of support for students with special educational needs and for the most able; behaviour; and the quality of information about their children's progress. There have been no significant improvements in links with parents since the last inspection.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

54. The new headteacher has been in post for just two terms and has a clear vision for the school, a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses and is developing strategies which will lead to improvements in standards. Her priority is to continue to improve teaching and learning and raise standards of attainment. There is now a clear sense of direction in the school and an impetus for change which has already had an impact on the quality of teaching. The head is supported by the wider senior team who work well on specific tasks but need to develop further their leadership and strategic management skills. There is a need to reconsider the roles of the senior team in the light of this report and the priorities described in the school's improvement plan. It is particularly important for a senior member of staff to be responsible for improving links with parents especially with regard to providing information on students' attainment and progress and to maintain and develop support for heads of department particularly those who have been appointed recently.

55. The school now uses detailed assessment data and individual student targets to help to raise students and staff expectations. There continues to be a need to use this information to improve further curriculum planning and to set more precise targets for individual students. There are now formal systems for evaluating and monitoring teaching involving senior staff and heads of department which are having an impact on improving standards. This could be usefully extended to disseminate good practice across the school. The school improvement

plan is cogent, realistic and appropriate. It does need, however, to be fully costed. On a day-to-day basis the school operates well and the ethos of the school is generally conducive to learning

56. The governing body is now more actively involved in assisting the headteacher to shape the future of the school and through its sub committees is beginning to monitor the effectiveness of policies. Governors provide good support to the headteacher. Statutory obligations are fulfilled with the exception of a daily act of worship and some minor corrections which are needed in the annual governors' report to parents.

57. Heads of department, year heads and other middle managers play an important in ensuring that the school runs smoothly. Management of pastoral care and support for form teachers is good. Many heads of department have been appointed recently and schemes of work and departmental documentation are being revised. The quality of leadership and management is good in many subjects and is especially strong in mathematics, ICT, RE and history. There are weaknesses in music, geography and in art where the new head of department is yet to take up post. Middle managers are becoming increasingly involved in shaping and implementing whole school policies and have started to monitor the effectiveness of teaching. There is a need to consider now how good practice can be disseminated across the school. Developments in the use of assessment information to inform teaching and learning should be a priority for all middle managers.

58. The school's systems for control of expenditure are satisfactory and the school is acting upon the recommendations made in the recent LEA audit. Information technology is being used effectively to keep financial records and to reduce time spent on administrative tasks such as recording absence. The school now has the capability to cost all its developments and this should be utilised. Heads of department and other budget holders receive excellent advice on the effectiveness and costs of services and there are many instances of best value principles being applied.

59. The strategic management of resources is generally satisfactory but for the last two years the school has not spent all of its budget for special educational needs. This is a situation which should be rectified immediately. The deficit on the school budget is within the limits set by the LEA and the governing body is vigilant in controlling expenditure. The school's income is around the national average and although teaching costs are below average the school has had to spend a well above average amount on supply staff. Greater stability in permanent staffing should help to address this. Staff development monies are being used prudently to target school and department priorities.

60. In-service provision for staff is now seen as a key issue and is linked to the priorities in the school improvement plan. The school is increasing the amount in this budget to meet the requirements of the staff development policy which targets improvements in teaching and learning. The induction of staff new to the school and newly qualified teachers is good. Newly qualified teachers are observed regularly and are supported well by their subject mentors and the professional tutor. The review cycle for performance management for teachers and administrative staff is now in operation and is working well.

61. Teachers are generally well qualified in the subjects they teach but the school does have a major problem in recruiting permanent staff and, in recent years, has had to employ a large number of supply teachers. Although some of these teachers receive good support there are examples of inadequate support where the quality of teaching and learning is affected.

62. The school is very well supported by capable administrative, kitchen, site management and technical staff. The amount of administrative support is high in relationship to similar schools but these staff are invaluable in ensuring that the school runs smoothly on a daily basis. Services provided to staff and students are good. There is, however, insufficient support for students with special educational needs in many areas of the curriculum. The school experiences major difficulties in recruiting lunchtime supervisory staff and has to rely on administrative and teaching staff to supervise students.

63. The school is set in an attractive environment with extensive playing fields. It is a large campus which is generally well maintained although the amount of litter around the school is unacceptably high. Some of the seventies classroom blocks are showing signs of dilapidation to external doors and windows. Internally, all teaching areas and corridors have been decorated during the past five years with the exception of the mathematics and design technology areas. In general the accommodation is sufficient for subjects to be taught effectively but many classrooms have poor acoustics with the result that noise levels are unacceptably high. The design technology block is in very poor condition and has not been refurbished for some years and the sports hall is dull, poorly lit and unwelcoming. The geography department is not located in one area and time is lost in moving resources across the school. Although, the cleaning staff work hard to keep the premises clean some areas of the school are dirty and shabby. Students' toilets are sufficient in number and are in a reasonable state of repair but some lack soap and do not provide enough privacy. The dining area is small for the numbers who use it and the short lunch period does not allow opportunities for extra curricular activities. Display work in classrooms is satisfactory but around the school many corridors are bleak and unattractive. The library and resources area is well used by students and is adequately resourced. It incorporates the careers library and is equipped with ICT resources. The librarian provides a very good service to staff and students.

64. The amount and quality of resources in subject areas are varied. They are very good in ICT and good in art and humanities but there are not enough books in science and English and the equipment for teaching some aspects of physical education is insufficient. In design technology the teaching of the resistant materials course is seriously compromised by the age and condition of some of the machinery and in science some of the workbenches require upgrading. The school is about to replace some of the oldest classroom furniture and has recently invested £3,000 in a machine for collecting litter. The plan to introduce new technologies, including information technology and networked computers, in all subject areas on a phased basis is largely in place and should begin to have an impact on the quality of students' learning.

65. Since the last inspection there have been improvements in the monitoring and evaluation of the school improvement plan and staffing resources are used more effectively. Staff development has improved significantly and better systems for financial control and planning are in place. The governing body is now more confident in exercising its monitoring and evaluation functions. Accommodation has been improved although there are areas of the school which need refurbishment. Resources for learning are improving but there are weaknesses in some areas. The school is not providing enough support for students with special educational needs.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

66. The school should now to seek to raise standards further and improve the quality of provision by:

- (a) improving the attainment of boys at Key Stage 4 by raising standards of literacy, providing individual support and developing detailed targets for improvement; (paragraphs 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 16, 20, 25, 72, 79, 90, 100, 113, 115, 119, 132, 134 and 145)
- (b) providing more individual and in-class support for students with special educational needs; (paragraphs 17, 29, 53, 62, 103, 112 and 149)
- (c) providing more information to parents about their children's progress and more opportunities to meet subject teachers; (paragraphs 50, 52 and 53)
- (d) ensuring that all temporary staff teach effectively by monitoring lessons carefully and providing day to day support; (paragraphs 15, 19, 61, 103 and 109)
- (e) developing spiritual education across the curriculum. (paragraphs 33, 34 and 65)

LINKS WITH THE COMMUNITY

67. The school has well established links with its local community which are supported and extended by a member of staff with specific responsibility for liaison. Visits by the liaison officer, the head of Year 7 and the special needs coordinator to meet staff and Year 6 students prior to their entry into the school have fostered good relationships with feeder primary schools. Headteachers meet regularly and students visit the primary schools to share their experiences of transition to Harriet Costello with Year 6 students and to help them with their reading. ICT and sports facilities are made available to contributory schools and there is collaboration on joint events as for example the organisation of a book week and the organisation of a sports day for primary students. There is close co-operation with other high schools on the organisation and delivery of the life skills and key skills courses run in collaboration with the two local colleges and on the provision of careers education and work experience. College staff also make a contribution to the school through regular careers events. A link established with King Alfred's College in Winchester led to a recent summer school for gifted students in Year 8 from Harriet Costello and further collaboration is planned. A summer school involving the local sixth form college was also organised involving Harriet Costello students from Year 7 and local primary school pupils.

68. The school has developed strong links with the local business community who play a key role in careers provision particularly through the bi-annual careers fair, careers workshops and a business simulation day. Over sixty business people take part in the programme of student interviews and there is regular support for the Young Enterprise and Neighbourhood Engineers projects. Use is made of external speakers across departments. A range of local organisations and employers provide long term placements for students on the life skills and key skills courses as well as provision for the two week work experience offered to all Year 10 students. The business expertise of several governors is also well used to support developments in the school.

69. There is regular involvement with the wider community through the support for charities organised by each year group. Where possible, this is linked to the curriculum as, for example, when support for Help the Aged led to senior citizens visiting the school to talk about their wartime experience. A Readathon was held in support of a cancer charity and

Year 10 students organised a sports day for the disabled. An element of community work is built into the life skills course. Community projects have been run in co-operation with the borough council and there is a regular input to personal and social education by the police. Links are well established with the National Health Trust through the joint appointment of the school nurse. The school also works closely with the careers service and with the library service particularly on book awards. Although adult education is separate from school provision lettings of school facilities mainly to youth groups have widened opportunities for students to participate in sporting activities.

70. Although primary curriculum links are limited, the school has worked very effectively with the local community to broaden the educational experience of its students.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	171
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	40

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4	26	35	30	5	0	0

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

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	Year 7 – Year 11
Number of students on the school's roll	987
Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals	38

Special educational needs	Year 7 - Year 11
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	5
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	183

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	16

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	21
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	45

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	77	95	172

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	50	60	55
	Girls	67	70	69
	Total	117	130	124
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	68 (82)	76 (81)	72 (84)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	23 (31)	49 (43)	25 (32)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	54	60	63
	Girls	74	65	76
	Total	128	125	139
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	74 (82)	73 (81)	81 (84)
	National	64 (61)	64 (64)	60 (61)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	32 (50)	38 (44)	38 (46)
	National	31 (30)	37 (27)	28 (30)

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	101	96	197

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	49	93	96
	Girls	60	90	93
	Total	109	183	189
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	55 (51)	93 (96)	96 (96)
	National	47 (45)	91 (90)	96 (95)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	44 (44)
	National	38 (37)

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 students who achieved all those they studied	School	N/A	N/A
	National		N/A

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	1
Indian	3
Pakistani	3
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	8
White	966
Any other minority ethnic group	3

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	110	2
Other minority ethnic groups	1	1

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	52.2
Number of students per qualified teacher	18.9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	12
Total aggregate hours worked per week	297

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.5
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	26.2
Key Stage 4	23.6

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	2,287,450
Total expenditure	2,315,101
Expenditure per student	2,445
Balance brought forward from previous year	13,493
Balance carried forward to next year	-14,158

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1004
Number of questionnaires returned	424

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	27	61	8	1	3
My child is making good progress in school.	22	54	8	1	15
Behaviour in the school is good	18	50	13	4	15
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	13	56	16	4	11
The teaching is good.	11	55	10	1	22
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	8	38	26	10	18
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem	29	53	10	1	7
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	31	51	8	1	9
The school works closely with parents.	7	42	27	8	16
The school is well led and managed.	11	50	12	1	26
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	16	57	11	1	16
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	13	44	15	4	24

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

ENGLISH

71. When students enter the school in Year 7 the profile of attainment is broadly average. Standards in English at Key Stage 3 have not improved since the last inspection. Key Stage 3 results have fluctuated considerably. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 results at both level 5 and above and level 6 and above were slightly better than the national average although results in 2000 were very much better. Over the last four years the performance of both boys and girls has been close to the national average. Girls do better than boys in the tests in line with the national situation although boys' results are improving year on year. Students do significantly better in mathematics and in science than in English at the end of Year 9. The 1999 Key Stage 3 test results compared with similar schools were well below average.

72. The school enters slightly more students for both GCSE English examinations than are entered nationally. Results in both English and English Literature were better than the national averages in 1999. Boys did less well than girls and the difference in performance between boys and girls is wider than that found nationally. In 1999 performance at the highest grades was broadly in line with national averages in both examinations. Results in English and in English Literature have fallen each year since 1998 and, in particular, the performance of boys in 2000 declined very significantly.

73. Attainment by the end of Year 9 is at least in line with the national average. Most students have made satisfactory progress although generally boys make less progress than girls. Students are able to write fluently and have a competent grasp of spelling, punctuation and grammar. A class in Year 9 examining the various styles of presentation in the press had good knowledge of technical terms and was able to use them appropriately. Students can make notes and understand the purpose of drafting. Girls, in particular, present their work well. High attainers write at length and develop their ideas well, some achieving a very good standard. Low attaining students are able to sustain their ideas quite well although the content and style of their work is often immature. Some low attaining students, especially those with special needs, have difficulty coping with the work set and are restricted by very weak literacy skills. Students in Year 7 were able to use the library sensibly and in Year 9 students were reading aloud fluently and expressively. Students are confident speakers and where there is opportunity enjoy discussion and expressing their ideas. In Year 8 students were presenting a product they had designed to the rest of the class. Boys, in particular, were confident speakers but the quality of their presentations was affected by a lack of commitment and effort.

74. Students generally make a good effort with the requirements of the GCSE course in language and literature. Overall progress is at least satisfactory and attainment above average. In Year 11 lower attaining students were very involved in the novel they were studying and all were able to illustrate their ideas about the development of character and plot by quoting from the text. They were able to plan a piece of written work using a carefully designed writing frame. Higher attaining students in Year 10 made very good progress in understanding how a narrative setting can influence readers' expectations of what might happen in a novel or short story. Students expressed their ideas fluently and discussion was lively and productive. They are beginning to make comparisons between different literary styles. Knowledge of the texts they have read is sound and they are able to consider theme and style in some depth. Work is generally fluent, technically accurate and well presented.

Some students in Year 11 produce writing of a good standard but overall fewer students attain the highest grades.

75. Literacy is addressed in some other subject areas. In French and German, for example, students are trained to listen carefully for key words and are familiar with grammatical terms. Students in geography can extract information successfully from resource materials and in history and RE very good use is made of key words through the use of glossaries. In PE appropriate emphasis is placed on presentation and accuracy. The school has a newly appointed literacy co-ordinator and discussion about strategies to improve basic skills is just beginning.

76. Many students have very good oral skills but there are too few carefully structured opportunities for them to express their ideas in a lively and thoughtful way. Some middle and low attaining students make very good progress in lessons and work hard but in some classes students, especially boys, make little effort with their work so that their progress is limited. In Year 10, for example, some boys had prepared their presentations with care but others had made very little effort. Low attaining students and those with special needs make good progress in smaller groups and in lessons where resources are carefully adapted to their needs but in some classes these students have difficulty in interpreting tasks and keeping up with the others. Insufficient use is made of individual education plans.

77. Overall students' response to English is satisfactory. Where teaching is strong and challenging tasks are presented in a purposeful way and students respond very positively. They are very willing to work collaboratively and co-operate well. They speak warmly of these lessons. In these lessons there is a high level of interest and participation, progress is good and boys respond well. Most students are well motivated and try hard. However, when the pace of lessons is slow and tasks are presented without variety or imagination some students, particularly boys, make much less effort with their work. In some lessons students do not expect to work hard.

78. Overall the quality of teaching at both Key Stages 3 and 4 is satisfactory. There is some teaching in both stages which is very good indeed and some that is weak. The department has had problems with staffing recently. The best lessons are carefully planned and structured so that tasks are varied and sequential and students are quite clear about what they have to do. In these lessons tasks are challenging and set at a level where all students can learn. The lessons proceed briskly, relationships with the teacher are good and students feel that they are valued and that their work is important and interesting. Some lessons, however, are not well planned and too little is expected of students. Tasks are pedestrian and there is little opportunity for students to participate. In these lessons the pace is very slow and too controlled by the teacher and consequently students become inattentive. Teachers do not insist that students listen and focus on their work and boys in particular take the opportunity to relax their efforts. Marking is generally helpful and comments and targets for improvement promote learning but some lacks useful detail and is negative in tone. Some good quality resources are used but these do not adequately reflect the differing needs of students in mixed attaining groups especially at Key Stage 3.

79. This department has had problems with staffing for some time. At present the head and second in department are relatively new in post, three teachers have other major responsibilities, one teacher is part time, one on supply and one is new to the profession. This has affected the stability of provision and the development of curriculum. The new head of department has a clear sense of direction and a good understanding of the issues which are current priorities for this subject. The monitoring of teaching should be extended to include sharing the good practice that exists in the department in order to broaden the range

of teaching and learning strategies used in the classroom with a clear focus on raising standards especially those of boys. The present level of curriculum planning at both key stages is not sufficiently rigorous to support teaching and should build on students' learning in the primary schools. The department now has access to very good assessment data on individual students and should now consider how best to use this to improve standards. Efforts should be made to ensure that departmental assessment is accurate particularly at Key Stage 3. Although the proportion of students with special needs is above average no in class support was seen during the week of the inspection. Links with the special needs department should be established and planning should take account of both high and low attaining students.

80. Despite some fluctuation from year to year the gender gap at GCSE reported at the last inspection is still very significant and wider than in most schools. The support noted last time for low attainers is no longer evident in classrooms and despite staffing changes since the last inspection the profile of teaching remains broadly similar. Some of the features of teaching, notably some low expectation at Key Stage 3, should now be addressed urgently. Although students do word process their work at home, the use of information technology is currently under developed in lessons although the new ICT facility and departmental curriculum planning should help to address this.

Drama

81. In the 2000 GCSE examinations, 74% of students entered for drama achieved grades A*- C. These results were better than in 1999 when 66% achieved grades A*-C and are comparable with results nationally.

82. Attainment in lessons at Key Stage 3 is average. Students in Year 9 have confident aural skills and are able to understand and develop ideas, although some lack knowledge and skills in drama techniques. Students in Year 7 are able to use freeze-frames and thought tracking is often clear, articulate and imaginative.

83. Attainment in lessons observed at Key Stage 4 is above average. Students in Year 10 produced good work on a challenging dance drama activity for their GCSE coursework. They can devise a piece of work incorporating movement and voice using a poem called Hide and Seek as the stimulus. In Year 11 students can use stage make-up effectively to simulate the ageing process.

84. Students' attitudes to drama are good, although at Key Stage 3 excitement can lead to some immature behaviour. At Key Stage 4, students become totally absorbed in their work, making considerable mental, physical and creative effort. This interest is inspired by good teaching, which in the best lessons challenges the students to achieve high standards through demanding tasks and pace, as in the dance drama lesson in Year 10. Students in Year 11 using make-up to age their hands show good commitment and concentration. Teachers plan and organise lessons well with relevant resources available. There is a period of reflection in most lessons which enables students to evaluate their work and progress. Students are confident in expressing their ideas and opinions, using language to convince, explain and speculate.

85. Drama provides good opportunities to explore moral and social issues through devised work done in groups. Extra curricular activities include productions of musicals and regular visits to the theatre.

MATHEMATICS

86. Overall the standards of attainment in mathematics are good.

87. When students enter the school their standards of attainment are generally above the national average. In the three years up to and including 1999 at least three quarters of all students had reached Level 4 or above in national testing at their primary schools, and almost one quarter of them had attained Level 5 or above. The year 2000 has seen a significant improvement on these good standards. Almost nine out of every ten students entering the school this year have attained Level 4 or above, and almost four out of every ten have reached Level 5 or better. The attainment of boys was better than that of girls at Level 4 or above in all years except 1999; at Level 5 or above the attainment of boys was better in all years.

88. Students make good progress during Key Stage 3, so that at the end of the key stage their overall standard of attainment is good. In all of the four years from 1997 to 2000 at least three quarters of all students reached Level 5 or above in national testing in the summer of Year 9, and almost half reached Level 6 or above. 1998 showed the strongest performance at Level 5 but the weakest at Level 6, otherwise standards have remained very similar over the four years. The performance of both boys and girls was well above the national average for the four year period from 1996 to 1999 and the improving trend over the period for the school was better than the national trend. Within the school the standards achieved in mathematics were better in comparison with the national average than those achieved in science and English, and in 1999 were also above the national average for similar schools.

89. By the end of Key Stage 3 most students can use confidently the four rules of number. They can work with fractions, decimals and percentages, and can use a calculator appropriately and accurately for straightforward operations. They are accustomed to the use of letters to represent numbers in algebra. They are familiar with a range of shapes in two and three dimensions, and with measurements in common use. They can collect data, tabulate it and represent it in a suitable graphical form. They can undertake a mathematical enquiry, working systematically and drawing appropriate conclusions.

90. This standard of attainment provides a good basis for the work to follow at Key Stage 4. Over the period from 1995 to 1998 at least half of all students in every year group attained a GCSE grade in the higher range of grades A*-C, and the great majority of all students attained a grade in the full range A*-G. Standards were highest in 1997, when almost six out of ten students gained a grade in the higher range A*-C, and standards of attainment overall were well above the national average. In these years the attainment of girls was better than that of boys, as it had been at the time of the previous inspection in 1995. In 1999 approximately half of all boys and of all girls gained a grade in the higher range A*-C, and standards of performance overall remained above the national average, though considered disappointing by the school. In the year 2000 more than six out of ten girls attained a grade in the higher range A*-C, restoring the performance of girls almost to their best ever, and to well above the national average. By contrast the performance of boys collapsed to a mere three out of ten gaining higher grades. Whilst the progress and attainment of girls was variable over the period but good overall, that of boys showed a marked decline of more than 26 percentage points over the four years from 1997, and although still good up to and including 1999 was distinctly poor in 2000. This is a key issue for the department and the school to address.

91. By the time they leave the school the majority of students can work with mathematical problems involving numbers of any size. They can simplify algebraic expressions, draw

graphs of algebraic functions, and use several techniques for the solution of equations. They can calculate the areas and volumes of a variety of shapes in two and three dimensions and can undertake calculations involving trigonometry. They can use a calculator for an extended range of operations. They can employ more sophisticated techniques for the analysis and representation of data, and can bring a substantial mathematical enquiry to a successful conclusion.

92. In science standards of numeracy are above average throughout the school; Year 7 students learn how to measure and record accurately using correct units, and by the end of Key Stage 3 students are displaying their results in a variety of graphical forms. In technology there is a particular strength in measuring and pattern cutting in textiles. Data handling is good in GNVQ ICT and business studies at Key Stage 4 and students can use their skills to undertake market research and to calculate market potential. Students are competent at the level at which they are required to work in geography, and similarly in physical education, the work mainly involving data collection and representation in both subjects.

93. Part of the reason for the decline in the standard of boys particularly at GCSE in the year 2000 lay in the acute staffing problems in the mathematics department up to that time. Two senior members of the department suffered from long term illness, and despite the best efforts of the school they proved very difficult to replace. These difficulties have now been largely overcome, and the situation in the mathematics department has been transformed as a result. Three new teachers have joined the three very capable part time teachers.

94. All of the teaching seen during the course of the inspection was at least satisfactory, and three quarters was good, and almost half was very good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and understanding, and their basic teaching skills are good. Their lessons are carefully planned and prepared, usually taking the form of introductory mental work, followed by the main activity of the lesson, with a concluding plenary section in which the class work of the lesson is marked and the main teaching points rehearsed. This is excellent practice. Suitable homework is set, and the marking of students' work is carried out in accordance with school and department policy.

95. The subject leader for mathematics is one of the three new teachers appointed this term. She has made the development of a new scheme of work her first priority; this is now well under way and all teachers are working to it. The department has a good textbook scheme with sufficient textbooks for each student.

96. Relationships between teachers and students are generally good. Teachers who have been in the school for some years generally know their students well, and new staff are making this a priority. Teachers strive to meet the needs of individual students as fully as possible. Low attaining students are taught in smaller groups in order to provide more individual attention. Students with special needs are taught in groups appropriate for their level of attainment in mathematics. Some receive additional support in class from a special needs assistant; arrangements for this in the current school year were just starting in the week of the inspection. Good provision is made for the most able mathematicians, both by facilitating their progress in class and encouraging them to attend master classes held in the town.

97. In most lessons students' attitudes to learning are good. They arrive punctually and settle to work without delay. They pay attention to the work on the board, and answer direct questions politely and usually accurately. They are confident speakers and are willing to explain their reasoning and to demonstrate on the board themselves when invited to do so. They usually apply themselves well to written work, and make good efforts in relation to

neatness and accuracy. They generally sustain their concentration well, and persevere with work they find more difficult. They are confident that they can ask for help and will receive it. Despite this there are a minority of boys, predominantly in lower attaining groups at Key Stage 4, who do not take advantage of the learning opportunities available to them. They do not disrupt lessons, but neither are they willing to listen, to learn, and to apply their learning to achieve the results of which they are capable in public examinations.

98. The mathematics department has enough accommodation so that teachers have their own teaching base, a great advantage in terms of facilitating efficient and varied teaching. Some of the rooms need painting. Most are in need of whiteboards or screens so that the department's overhead projectors can be used. There are too few scientific and graphical calculators to guarantee their availability for classroom use. Although there is an adjacent computer room, at present there is no use of computers to enhance teaching because there is no usable software.

99. Since the last inspection the department has maintained the standards of students at Key Stage 3, and of girls at Key Stage 4. The teaching seen in this inspection is very much better than that seen last time. The department is now very capably led and teachers already work well as a team. In order to raise standards in the future the department should now consider ways to improve the standards of boys as a priority; complete the scheme of work and other essential documentation; start to use information technology to support students' learning; promote oral work in lessons by encouraging students to explain their thinking and suggest alternative approaches to the work in progress.

SCIENCE

100. Standards achieved by the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 are above national expectations. The results of the 1999 Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests were well above the national average for those gaining Level 5 and above, and above the national average for Level 6 and above. Teacher assessments were well above the national averages at both levels. Compared to schools having similar proportions of students eligible for free school meals the results were above average for Level 5 and above and below average for both Level 6 and above and on average points scored. Over the past four years the average points score has been above the national averages and has followed the national trend with girls performing better than boys. The proportion gaining A*- C grades in GCSE double award science in 1999 was in line with the national average with no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. The 1999 GCSE results in biology, chemistry and physics were above the national average with all students gaining at least a grade C. However, the proportions gaining the highest grades A* and A were significantly below average, particularly in chemistry. The results in double science and separate sciences were significantly better than those of the previous year. The proportion gaining A*- C grades this year was not quite as high as last year in double science but was similar in separate sciences. However, the proportions gaining the highest grades rose significantly. Girls out performed boys by a large margin in double science indicating some underachievement by middle and lower attaining boys.

101. Students enter the school with attainment levels in science which are above average. Year 7 students soon learn good, safe laboratory practice and how to observe and measure accurately and record appropriately. By the end of Year 9 students have a good knowledge and secure understanding of the subject matter in each of the attainment targets. Higher attainers in Year 9 know how metals react and apply their knowledge and understanding well when making predictions. Most Year 9 students can describe, using correct terms, the

differences between plant and animal cells. Lower attainers identify kinds of forces and describe what they do. During Key Stage 4 most students continue to make progress which is at least satisfactory and frequently good or better in lessons. Most Year 11 students handle competently calculations regarding electrical circuits and the higher attainers talk confidently about active sites on enzyme molecules, transport systems in plants and polymerisation reactions. Lower attaining students describe food chains and apply their knowledge of techniques to simple mixture separations. Planning and predicting skills are above expected levels by the end of Year 9 and those of interpretation and evaluation are also above average by the end of Year 11. Students have the numeracy skills to process their experimental results and display them in various graphical forms. They are careful to use correct terminology and take pride in the presentation of their work.

102. Public examination results have been inconsistent since the last inspection and are now similar to last time. There is still some underachievement – mainly of middle attainers in Years 10 and 11. There is now enough curriculum time to deliver the GCSE courses. Facilities to develop ICT skills have improved and more are imminent which should enable students to gain more ‘hands on’ experience. Some improvements have been made to the accommodation but not all laboratories have mains services on central benches and some need refurbishment. There is a shortage of textbooks throughout and students do not have copies for use at home.

103. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. It is almost always at least satisfactory, most is good and some lessons are very good or excellent. The quality of supply teaching seen was unsatisfactory. Most teachers make a prompt start to lessons by ensuring students enter in an orderly manner and immediately focus their attention by giving them a short task. In the best lessons teachers have an enthusiastic approach with lively exposition using examples to which students can easily relate for example recent topical events such as the Olympic Games. Skilful questioning is used to draw out information from students or to check understanding. When teachers new to the school have got to know students they will be able to exploit this knowledge by targeting questions more effectively. Lessons are usually well planned with a broad variety of activities. In one excellent lesson the teacher’s calm, friendly and firm approach encouraged students to put forward ideas about how an experiment should be performed. They then carried out the practical investigation working safely and co-operating very well with each other. Students were fully engaged throughout and found the task challenging. By the end of the lesson all had gained new knowledge and developed practical and observation skills and some were able to apply this knowledge effectively. In an unsatisfactory lesson, however, students were simply following instructions given by the teacher and repeating skills already acquired and consequently they were not challenged. In another lesson students did not settle and they were given too much time to extract relevant information from texts so interest was lost, students became restless and gained little from the lesson. In two practical lessons progress was hindered because students had access to mains services on the side benches only so that some were not fully involved. In a lesson where a large number of students had special needs the teacher was unable to meet some individual demands. Class management is usually good and teachers organise practical work in a safe orderly manner. Time is used efficiently in most lessons. In-class support is used very effectively and most students with special needs make good progress because they are taught well in smaller groups and provided with suitable tasks. The needs of higher attaining students are met through appropriate grouping arrangements. Teachers set homework regularly often to reinforce work done in class and mark work in accordance with departmental policy.

104. Most students are well behaved, attentive and interested and keen to succeed. There are however, a small number of older students, mainly boys, who have poor attitudes and do not want to learn. They frequently need reminding to pay attention and keep on task.

Students co-operate very well in groups, work safely and productively and handling equipment carefully. They respond well and higher attainers particularly are very articulate, giving relevant detail in answers and applying their knowledge and understanding well.

105. The curriculum meets statutory requirements and has added breadth through GCSE courses in double science and separate sciences. Good use is made of assessment data in setting targets for individual students. New schemes of work are being developed to incorporate recent developments in the National Curriculum and to improve continuity. Supply teachers would benefit from more detailed lesson plans. More effective liaison with the feeder schools to aid smooth transition is planned.

106. The new head of department has already identified appropriate priorities for development including strategies to address the underachievement of some students. All except two teachers are new this term. They are appropriately qualified and deployed effectively. There is already a team spirit with evident common commitment to high standards and continuous improvement. Monitoring of teaching is underway and newly qualified teachers receive good support. The technicians provide much valued and effective support. The new team is in a good position to make further improvements.

ART

107 Standards of attainment in art are in line with national expectations. Students' attainment when they enter the school in Year 7 is in line with the national average. At the time of inspection, early in the school year, there was no head of department in post, most teaching was by staff new to the school and evidence of past work was incomplete. On the basis of this very limited sample, attainment in a very small range of activities by the end of Key Stage 3 is slightly above average. Students make sound progress in drawing from direct observation and in painting skills. In Year 7 there was satisfactory acquisition of new skills, development in the use of tone and colour and an increasing awareness of the work of artists of different times and movements.

108. At the end of Key Stage 4, the number of students attaining the higher A*-C grades at GCSE in 1999 was slightly below the national average. Although the attainment of girls was higher than that of boys, girls' results were below those of girls nationally while boys' results were broadly in line with the average for boys nationally. An unusually high proportion of boys were entered for the examination in comparison with figures nationally so affecting the overall results as girls nationally achieve better results in art. GCSE results in 2000 are considerable improved for both girls and boys. Students' work indicates progress in knowledge and understanding of colour, tone, pattern and line although the representation of form in both two and three dimensions is not secure in Year 10. Year 11 students show increasing ability to develop their work imaginatively and to present it well.

109. The quality of teaching has improved since the time of the last inspection although there is still some weak teaching at both key stages. This is caused by the current staffing situation in the department where new teachers, unfamiliar with the schemes of work and the progress of students, lack guidance from a head of department on establishing expectations and standards. Where teaching is confident, expectations are high as in a Year 11 class where there was a good review of work to date and clear targets set for improvement. In a Year 10 lesson, however, there was a lack of challenge where course content was not fully understood and relationships with students had not been established. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject are also variable. Long term planning as outlined in the scheme of work is satisfactory and organisation generally sound but some lessons lack structure and there is insufficient use of a variety of teaching methods to reinforce learning.

Class management is, mostly, appropriate. Good use is made of homework to reinforce class topics. Work is marked regularly and there is on-going assessment in lessons indicating awareness of students' progress particularly at Key Stage 4.

110. Where teaching stimulates interest, students gain in skill development, knowledge and understanding as, for example, in a Year 7 lesson where learning about print making was clearly extended. In Year 11, where students take greater responsibility for the direction of their own work, there is evidence of an extension of imaginative skills. In contrast, when there is insufficient teacher explanation and stimulus materials are of poor quality, as in a Year 10 drawing activity, student's work slowly, there is little learning and productivity is poor. Students' knowledge of their own learning was insecure at this early stage in the school year although when there was good teacher review of previous work, they could speak with confidence about their work. Students with special educational needs make appropriate progress except when the behavioural problems of a few prevent active participation in lessons.

111. Students are positive about art and, where their interest is engaged, apply themselves well to their work and pay due regard to safe and sensible practice. They co-operate well with each other and behaviour is generally satisfactory although on occasions the behaviour of some students disrupts the learning of others. The subject makes a positive contribution to personal development through fostering mutual respect and collaboration; cultural understanding forms an integral element of the art curriculum and there is opportunity to explore spiritual values as in a Key Stage 4 project on human rights.

112. Some aspects of the art curriculum have not improved since the last inspection. Too much time is given to graphical skills rather than a variety of media studies to develop the full range of National Curriculum experience at Key Stage 3. Students have no experience in the use of ICT in art and there is still too little opportunity for independent learning. Although there is good co-operation between teachers, the current lack of leadership is detrimental particularly in the monitoring and support of new staff. Documentation is sound but planned developments are not being implemented. The integration of special needs students, raised in the last report, has now been addressed but there is too little support for students with behavioural difficulties. The amount of contact time has been improved. Reports indicate good knowledge of individual progress.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY(DT)

113. At the end of Key Stage 3, the majority of students attain levels in teacher assessments that are in line with the national average. Girls are achieving better results than boys, but the gap is not significant. At Key Stage 4, GCSE results in food subjects and textiles are generally very good. Textiles is still taken mainly by girls but a good proportion of boys study food. In food subjects in 1999, both boys and girls results were significantly above the national average, although boys' results were disappointing in the most recent examination. Results in textiles were excellent in 1999. Graphic products results are below average overall because of low results by boys. Results in resistant materials are broadly in line with the national average; few girls are attracted to this area of study at this stage. DT results overall are above the national average, girls perform better than boys, although the gap has narrowed since the last inspection.

114. At Key Stage 3, standards of work observed during the inspection are good. This is evident in resistant materials where Year 7 students have developed a good technical vocabulary. They are able to identify and use basic measuring and cutting tools both

accurately and safely. Students can describe the way a strip heater is used to bend acrylic plastic and are fully aware of the dangers if used incorrectly. In another Year 7 class, students can construct a time plan when designing and making a pitta bread pizza. They demonstrate good understanding of how ingredients, such as onion, tomato and cheese, combine to produce pleasant flavours and textures. Similarly, Year 8 textiles students are good at designing and making skills, for example when making a patchwork cover for a cushion. They have developed good technical skills and use tacking and machine sewing techniques in the construction of their designs. At Key Stage 4, standards in resistant materials are good. Students have developed design folders that show an understanding of design methodology and are beginning to use these skills in their practical work in wood and plastics. In Year 11, the majority of textiles students are able to research patterns and designs from other cultures. The standard of attainment is good and students are making good progress in developing technical skills. They understand the importance of good edge finishes in their work and know how to control the stretch of a fabric by cutting to a set bias. In food subjects, standards of attainment are very good. Year 10 students know that there are many different types of bread and have conducted a survey to find out individuals' preferences. They are competent in the skills of mixing, kneading and baking bread. In Year 10 graphic products, students worked independently using ICT graphics software in work on movie marketing. They combined their own freehand drawing, downloaded graphics and various fonts to produce movie posters. GNVQ health and social care students achieve well. They are able to work independently when, for example, researching brands of toothpaste. They use Excel spreadsheets to collect and collate data, and have good desk top publishing skills. They are able to interpret their findings using graphics such as pie charts and bar charts.

115. There has been a significant improvement throughout the department since the last inspection. At Key Stage 3, staff have re-written the schemes of work and matched these with effective assessment procedures, including student self-assessment. This together with the recruitment of new staff has helped to improve standards. At the last inspection there were shortcomings in the design and purpose of tasks and the pace of lessons; these aspects are now strengths. Textiles has remained the province of girls, although, in food subjects both boys and girls achieve above average results. Attainment in both areas has improved since the last report. Results in graphic products have improved since the last inspection and girls' results are now well above average. Boys' results remain disappointingly low. Boys' results in resistant materials results have improved over the past five years but girls' results are below average and below the national trend. Teaching was sound or better at the last inspection and is now mainly good. Good teaching has developed students' learning skills and they are more focused now on the projects and tasks set for them.

116. The department enjoys positive leadership. The appointment of a new head of department for resistant materials and graphics has helped to develop an effective partnership with food and textiles. Schemes of work at Key Stage 3, together with new assessment procedures, provide a greater challenge and purpose in lessons. DT provides well for students of all abilities. Students with special needs are making very good progress. Homework is set regularly for students and is relevant to their learning needs. Students are enthusiastic and have positive attitudes towards learning. There is a good balance of design, research and basic practical skill learning. Standards of teaching throughout the department are good. Teachers use a range of teaching strategies effectively to meet learning needs. In a Year 7 resistant materials class open ended questioning techniques provided a basis for valuable classroom discussions on the safe use of tools. Students are taught to manage time efficiently and pace themselves within lessons that include designing and making tasks, as in food where a time plan ensures that food is cooked by the end of the lesson. Basic skills are taught through focused practical tasks, with a strong emphasis on accuracy, as in

Year 11 resistant materials where students were taught how to mark out and cut a lap joint. The teacher outlined the necessary skills needed through a short but effective demonstration. Extra-curricular provision provides opportunities for low attaining and more able students to improve the range and quality of their work. The introduction of more effective assessment procedures at both stages has resulted in target setting for individuals and a greater emphasis on student self-assessment. This is particularly well established in GNVQ health and social care.

117. Accommodation for DT varies. It is good in textiles, where the room is well proportioned and fitted with appropriate furniture. It is also good in the main graphics area, where ICT facilities are good. The rooms allocated for food technology are adequate but some of the cookers are in need of maintenance, pilot lights are faulty and fail to ignite the ovens. Accommodation for resistant materials is poor, rooms have been sadly neglected for a long time and furniture and machines are out of date and in urgent need of renovation. The condition of these workshops has a marked effect upon standards.

GEOGRAPHY

118. Students' overall level of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above the national expectation. In the lessons seen attainment was average. When teachers assessed students' work in 1999 at the end of the key stage they achieved levels well above the national average with boys and girls achieving similar levels and this standard was maintained in 2000.

119. At the end of Key Stage 4 students' overall level of attainment is well above the national norm. In the lessons seen attainment was slightly above the national average. In 1999, results in GCSE were well above the national average although there was a decline in 2000 to a level above the national norm. Girls achieve significantly higher grades than boys whose results were below the national average for boys in 2000. This difference has increased during the last four years. The department reviews these results annually, but a rigorous strategy for raising the standards of boys has not been implemented.

120. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress at both key stages, and good progress when they are supported in class and are provided with materials which support their specific needs.

121. Students have a sound knowledge of different environments and ways of life of the people who live there. One group of students in Year 8 labelled accurately a diagram to show the way of life of people living in the Amazon rainforest. They have a good knowledge of their home region, in Year 7 one group described the rocks accurately, and students in Year 10 explained the location of leisure facilities in the area. At Key Stage 4 students have a good knowledge of how landscapes are formed, the geographical features of cities and have a sound knowledge of geographical terms.

122. All students can extract information effectively from a range of resource material. At Key Stage 4 they collect competently and analyse information in order to produce an extended study of the impact of tourism and the work of rivers in the Brecon Beacons National Park. They generally write accurately in complete sentences but only higher attaining students make regular use of geographical terms. The numerical skills of students are sound and they can use statistical data to produce graphs to describe and often explain what they show.

123. The quality of teaching at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory overall, but some is unsatisfactory and some is good. At Key Stage 4 the quality of teaching is generally good. Lessons start briskly and proceed smoothly as teachers are well organised and well prepared. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject especially at Key Stage 4 but this is not always used effectively to promote students' knowledge and understanding through the use of challenging questioning and discussion. Lessons are planned carefully with clear objectives and with a variety of well thought out activities. In the best lessons students are encouraged to use the knowledge and understanding they have gained in a new context. Students in Year 10 used their knowledge of 'hierarchy' to explain the pattern of leisure facilities in Basingstoke. Teachers maintain generally a good pace through the lessons ensuring that sound progress is made but often the ending of lessons is inconclusive and does not reinforce the learning that has taken place.

124. At Key Stage 4 relationships with students are generally good. In some lessons in Key Stage 3 the management of students and their behaviour is weak and a minority of students are noisy, 'off task' for a period of time and do not work to full capacity, so progress is slow. Marking is generally of good quality, in line with departmental policy, and comments are helpful. Teachers generally know the needs of individual students but work in many lessons is not matched to their needs.

125. Learning is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 3 the majority of students generally listen carefully, complete work successfully and make good progress. They maintain their books in good order and present work neatly. A minority of students, who are mainly boys, have a short attention span and rely on the teacher to repeat instructions and help them retain focus and, consequently do not reach their full potential. At Key Stage 4 students settle to work quickly, are confident enough to ask for help when it is required, generally participate willingly in the lesson, and work at a good pace and make good progress.

126. Students generally have a positive attitude to the subject, are attentive and work hard. The attitude of a minority at Key Stage 3 is poor and they show little interest without teacher intervention. At Key Stage 4 students are generally mature and behave well. They listen to each other's point of view and co-operate effectively in groups.

127. The scheme of work is good and meets statutory requirements. The small amount of fieldwork at Key Stage 3 does not provide a coherent programme to develop further students' understanding of the method of geographical enquiry and provide support for GCSE coursework. There is minimal opportunity for the use of ICT in the subject. Assessment is good and is well organised particularly through Key Stage 3 and results in a sound assessment of levels at the end of the key stage. A good recording system leads to good use of assessment for monitoring and supporting students' progress.

128. The department is part of the humanities faculty which is well organised and has sensible policies which the subject shares. The subject has no head of department, at present, to ensure rigorous monitoring and provide a strategic vision for the future. This, and the fact that the department is accommodated in a series of rooms in widely different parts of the school, make the support of new and supply teachers and departmental identity very difficult, and leads to inefficiencies in the use of resources.

129. The department has maintained the high standards set at the time of the last inspection in GCSE examinations but girls are still achieving much higher standards than boys. Leadership has been weakened, the rooms used are still widely scattered, and there is still inadequate attention given to students of differing attainment. The staff has a shared

commitment to succeed but without a teacher directly responsible for leading the department forward success will be difficult to achieve.

HISTORY

130. The attainment of the majority of students at the end of Key Stage 3 is average. They can describe the main features of the period they are studying and have a good basic knowledge of major events and significant personalities of the period. They understand that historians draw their conclusions from a variety of sources and can use structured source material to write detailed descriptive narrative of historical events. They are weaker at giving reasons to explain events and in using sources critically by evaluating their appropriateness and reliability as evidence. Project work by some students in Year 9, however, showed above average attainment in the use of sources to investigate events surrounding the Holocaust and to write group accounts about aspects of the First World War.

131. The attainment of most students at the end of Key Stage 4 is average. Their work, especially written work, shows progress in range of historical knowledge and in understanding the interplay of short and long term causes to explain historical change. They can write reasonably detailed accounts of historical events and personalities using a number of source materials, but they rarely analyse sources critically and are weak in evaluating the usefulness of the sources they are using for the study of the past.

132. Examination results at GCSE have shown consistent improvement over recent years, the percentage of students gaining A*-C grades having matched or exceeded the national average in two of the past three years. Results have been above the national average for A*-G grades. The poor performance of boys in the most recent examination, however, brought the overall pass rate below the national average for A*-C grades. The performance of girls has been consistently better than that of boys, significantly so in the past two years, and is well above the national average for girls. However, boys' performance has matched or exceeded that of boys nationally in two of the past three years. The proportion of the cohort entered for the examination in recent years has been below the national average. The numbers studying history among current Year 10 students shows a significant increase and matches the national average. The attainment of the great majority of students in history on entry to the school is average. Achievement is satisfactory in Key Stage 3. Many girls achieve well at GCSE.

133. The quality of learning in both key stages is good. Most students both within and across the key stages are making appropriate progress. Very good learning was observed in a Year 7 lesson in which students were exploring a number of possible reasons for the Norman invasion and the Battle of Hastings. Students participated with interest and enthusiasm and co-operated well with each other in classroom activities. Students in a Year 11 lesson studying Stalinist Russia, entered enthusiastically into a role-play, which helped them to clarify their previous learning and extend their knowledge. This activity prompted several spontaneous contributions to whole class discussion, especially from girls, who expressed their views with confidence. The attitude of the great majority of students to the subject is positive. This is indicated by their good behaviour in class, willingness to work in lessons and by the increased numbers opting to take the subject at GCSE. The great majority of students apply themselves with diligence to the work set, sustain concentration, relate well to each other and show interest and courtesy when others are speaking or reading.

134. The quality of teaching in both key stages is good, and in a third of lessons it is very good. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. Teachers are well qualified and their good subject knowledge enables them to plan effective lessons which engage students and provide varied opportunities for them to learn about the past and to develop appropriate skills of historical investigation. Good teaching in a Year 8 lesson on sixteenth century London was characterised by careful planning which covered several key elements of the national curriculum for history, a well-organised activity which helped students to understand that historical events may be viewed from different perspectives and firm control and management which kept the class on task and maintained their engagement with the topic. All lessons at Key Stage 4 have clearly stated objectives and students understand what is required of them. Expectations are high and students are encouraged to work at a good pace and to produce their best work. Affirmative and supportive comment by teachers encourages students to persevere. Provision is made for students with special needs by the use of suitably adapted learning materials and direct support from the teacher when required. Additional classroom support is sometimes available but lack of consistency in the amount of support is a weakness.

135. Assessment of students' work is thorough and written work is marked regularly with helpful comments added. Students in Key Stage 3 are set targets related to national curriculum levels, but they cannot explain what these targets mean or what they need to do to achieve them. At Key Stage 4 students have a good understanding of what they need to do to improve and targets are set in relation to GCSE performance. Statutory requirements for the end of Key Stage 3 assessment are met and grades match the level of attainment observed in lessons. The grades given by individual teachers, however, are not moderated to ensure consistency across the whole cohort being assessed. The curriculum provides opportunities for students to learn about significant aspects of their cultural heritage and contributes to their social and moral development by considering themes such as war and peace and racism. Few visits are made to museums or sites of historical significance and there are no planned visits to complement and extend students' learning beyond the classroom.

136. The quality of departmental management is a strength of the subject. The department is given clear and effective leadership by a committed and enthusiastic teacher. The morale of teachers is high and they work well together as a team. Good support is given to new and non-specialist teachers of the subject. Considerable work has been done in re-writing schemes of work to comply with the requirements of the National Curriculum. Increasingly effective use is being made of information technology which students are encouraged to use in the presentation of their work. The specialist teachers of the subject have benefited from recent in-service training, especially in relation to raising students' attainment. This is an important factor in the improved overall performance of students at GCSE. Resources have improved since the last inspection with the purchase of a range of textbooks matched to the needs of the full ability range. Accommodation in the specialist rooms is good, well used and provides a stimulating environment for learning.

137. Significant improvements have been made since the last inspection in the standards attained by students at both key stages, in the quality of teaching and of learning and in management and planning. The curriculum now meets statutory requirements. Further improvements need to be made in raising the attainment of boys at GCSE, in helping students to develop skills of critical evaluation of source materials in both key stages, in helping students in Key Stage 3 to have a clearer understanding of what they must do to attain the targets set, in moderating the end of Key Stage 3 assessments to ensure consistency of gradings and in enhancing students' classroom experience through visits to places of historical significance.

138. This is a good department which is making a significant contribution to students' intellectual and personal development.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

139. At Key Stage 3, students arrive in school with standards in line with the national average. They are confident users of ICT and most have good keyboard skills. At the end of Key Stage 3, students achieve National Curriculum levels that are above the national average. There is no significant difference between boys' and girls' performance at this stage. GCSE information technology and business studies results have improved significantly over the past few years and attainment in the higher grades of both subjects are well above average. GNVQ Intermediate results are significantly above average. At Key Stage 4, girls achieve better than the boys in both subjects, although boys' results are still above the national norm.

140. At Key Stage 3, the schemes of work, re-written in response to criticisms made in the last OFSTED report, are now very good. They provide suitable challenge and students are well motivated. Year 7 students are capable of creating pictorial designs using 'PAINT' software. They can write a paragraph describing their first impressions of the school using key words and highlighting them in bold or italic format. Students use colour with confidence and are able to change fonts and text sizes. In Year 8 they investigate and explore the opportunities provided by "PowerPoint" software. In a project on theme parks they planned the layout, showed the position and size of rides, restaurants and toilets and used colour coding to show placements on the site. The majority of Key Stage 3 students are adept at using the mouse and keyboard. They work independently and are able to interpret information from written instructions. In Year 9 students were set the task of planning the layout of a store, designing posters and an advertising flyer. ICT staff have developed differentiated materials so that both special needs and high attaining students make good progress by working at the most appropriate level.

141. At Key Stage 4, GNVQ students achieve good standards of attainment. They are able to match the style of their writing to meet different requirements when communicating with local companies. GCSE students are very capable. In a Year 11 class they use FLOWOL control software to control the lighting sequence for traffic lights at a busy junction. Business studies students are confident using contacts with local businesses and are able to analyse market research techniques, such as desk and field research, when investigating market information. There are a high proportion of students with special needs in all examination groups who make good progress and achieve very good results. ICT application across the curriculum is good, as in graphic products where students use scanning processes, clip art and desktop publishing techniques to design a film poster. GNVQ health and social care students make good use of the school's lap top computers to collate data using Excel spreadsheets, and to construct bar and pie charts. Statutory requirements are fully met in ICT at both key stages.

142. At the time of the previous inspection, ICT was identified as an area that needed to raise students' levels of expectation and achievement. These points have been fully addressed and the ICT department is now a real strength in the school. ICT staff provide successful courses for the staff of feeder primary schools and there is good contact with sixth form and further educational establishments. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 have improved from below average at the last inspection to above average in the most recent teacher assessment. All lessons have clear aims and objectives and students are aware of their own National Curriculum levels. This has been achieved by introducing projects that are

linked to realistic situations where students are able to identify a need and solve a problem as in a lesson where modelling was used to prepare an expense account for a school trip. Accommodation and resourcing for ICT have improved and the department now has three fully resourced computer suites and another two planned for the near future. There has been a significant improvement in ICT standards. Results have improved from well below average to significantly above average over the period since the last inspection. The gap in performance of boys and girls has been reduced and both do well in examinations. Very good industrial links have been established and these provide valuable links for GNVQ, GCSE ICT and business studies students.

143. The standard of teaching within the department is very good, and on occasions excellent. The two core teachers for ICT, the head of the ICT department and the head of GNVQ ICT and business studies, provide a high standard of expertise. Both are well qualified and have a good knowledge of the subject. Students are well managed, as in a Year 7 lesson where the teacher made out a seating plan for the class matching partners to support each other in the set tasks. Teachers make good use of their expertise and are able to motivate all students. They provide clear instructions and well designed task sheets, as in the differentiated work available at both key stages. Basic skills are well taught, as in Year 7 where students are taught basic word processing techniques such as copying text, and cut and paste skills. Progress in ICT lessons is very good; students recognise the opportunities available to them and respond well to the tasks set. Students at both key stages are positive about ICT. There is good and profitable discussion in all classes and teachers use open-ended questions effectively to stimulate thinking and encourage students to express a point of view. ICT makes a major contribution to social, moral and cultural education, as in a project demonstrating the technology involved in fighting credit card fraud. At Key Stage 4, students are encouraged to talk about their achievements. In a Year 10 GNVQ ICT class students were able to demonstrate their knowledge by providing examples of different writing styles. Relationships within classrooms are excellent and make a major contribution to the progress made by students who are self-confident and prepared to ask questions when they are unsure. Assessment procedures are good and, in GNVQ ICT, provide opportunities for students to assess their own work. Teachers use assessment effectively to set individual targets. Students make very good use of the extra-curricular opportunities available to them. They also make good use of lap top computers for both school and home based work.

144. The computer suites are of good size but have very poor ventilation and they become uncomfortably hot when used by large classes.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

145. In the 2000 GCSE examinations the percentages of students gaining grades A*-C in French and German were below the national averages for all maintained schools. In both subjects girls achieved in line with national figures and improved on the 1999 results, although generally below their results in other subjects. Boys' results in both languages were well below national averages for boys, below their performance in other subjects and well below the percentages achieved by girls.

146. At the end of both key stages the standards of most students are in line with national expectations. At both key stages students show good aural skills when listening to teacher instructions – a clear benefit of teachers' sustained use of the target language. When listening to recorded material students can pick out key information but often need repeated listening. The speaking skills of higher attaining students are often good, with girls performing better than boys. Even where students have reasonable fluency, pronunciation is often very

literal, especially when reading a text. Standards of writing match national expectations. When writing, lower attaining students can copy and substitute. In Year 8 some higher attaining students express opinions in extended writing at the level expected of a higher year group. However, much of the written work seen shows common grammatical errors and points to a need for teaching to revisit key grammar points. Reading receives little focus. Students use dictionaries to support learning, but errors noted in Key Stage 4 suggest that more formal teaching of dictionary skills is needed. Whilst there is good learning in most lessons, weaknesses observed with several groups of lower attaining students point to insecure earlier learning and the need to adapt teaching to meet these weaknesses.

147. The quality of teaching at both key stages is satisfactory and often good. Teachers have good language competence and challenge the students by using French and German almost exclusively. Lessons are well prepared to take account of ability levels and reflect good on-going assessment by teachers. Expectations of higher attaining students are explicit in the level, quantity and pace of work. Activities are well sequenced. Teachers use a variety of resources and approaches to sustain interest including video, audiotapes, games and singing. Appropriate strategies support the learning of lower attaining students and those with special needs. Homework is regularly set and marked to criteria which are in the students' books. Staff give helpful corrections and encouragement, but make few demands for corrections, redrafting or extended writing. Teachers' good personal knowledge of the students is a major contributory factor in the good learning of some groups and in the sensitive management of those groups that have reluctant learners.

148. Students in Year 7 are settling well into new routines. In one group a student took the initiative to help another student who had missed work through absence. In other year groups higher attaining students create a good work ethic and work well individually and in pairs. Some students in Year 11 attend voluntarily extra lessons for oral work. In some sets of lower attaining students with little self-confidence and a poor attitude to the subject behaviour is not good. These students lack motivation and their behaviour affects the learning of others in the group. Even in these groups students apologise readily for their behaviour. They feel more secure with established teachers, perhaps because they have lacked teacher continuity in the past.

149. At Key Stage 3 all students follow the National Curriculum. At Key Stage 4 the school is seeking disapplication for an unusually high percentage of students, especially boys, so that in Year 10 almost half the students study no foreign language. The school has tried different strategies to introduce a second language but the take up at Key Stage 4 has been very low. The banding of half years in Key Stage 3 allows for some limited setting but the teachers still have to cater for a broad range of ability. In some groups the number of students with special needs create special problems in teaching in the absence of adequate support staff in lessons.

150. The department is well led by an experienced teacher. There are clearly understood systems and records and the department's policies are in line with the school's aims. Full schemes of work are in place. Teaching would be enhanced if these schemes were integrated with guidance on methodology, opportunities for assessment and a listing of supportive resources. Strategic planning for the future is excellent in identifying key issues and the action needed to address them. Some monitoring of teaching is already taking place to support teaching and identify good practice. Staff would benefit from an extension of this to mutual observation. The department's systems for assessment are good. Mark books record key assessment data about individual students. At Key Stage 3 students are assessed at least once a term against National Curriculum criteria in all four skills. This information is used as the basis for setting and identifying able students. The department would benefit from using all the available data to monitor individual performance, particularly

for the identification of under achieving boys. The department is aware that the use of ICT is under-developed. Proposed staff development and inclusion in schemes of work could enhance teaching and learning and might contribute to changing attitudes to the subject amongst boys. The department now has a full team of competent and experienced teachers capable of addressing the identified issues and raising the profile and attainment of modern languages.

151. Since the last inspection the quality of teaching has improved and all staff have the linguistic competence to conduct lessons at all levels in the target language. At the last inspection there was evidence of under-achievement in half the lessons observed. In this inspection the majority of students at all levels of attainment are making steady progress and achieving satisfactory standards of attainment. Successful strategies were noted in the teaching of special needs students and some higher attaining groups. Where there is still under-achievement is in the key skill of speaking and in those groups where teacher expectations of students with average ability are too low.

MUSIC

152. In 1999 72% of students taking the examination in music at GCSE level achieved grades A*-C. As the numbers of students taking the examination were few, a comparison with national averages is inappropriate.

153. In lessons at Key Stage 3 attainment is average overall. In Year 7 students can sing in small groups and accompany themselves with percussion instruments with variable success. In one class this was successfully done with most students singing confidently and in tune, without piano support, but maintaining a pulse with percussion. Students in another class were not as successful and some lost pitch and pulse as the song progressed. Students in Year 8 can play the tune of 'Love me Tender' quite successfully on xylophones, glockenspiels and metallophones. Those students in Year 8 playing the 'Black Note March' on keyboards can use a good five finger technique confidently. Most students in this class make a successful effort to transpose this tune aurally to the white notes. Students in Year 9 compose, play and notate a raga on keyboards and other instruments. A few students can improvise on this and the results are fluent and very expressive.

154. In lessons at Key Stage 4 attainment is average overall. Students in Year 11 find composing more difficult than performing but in groups they eventually create an atmospheric opening for their compositions based on the poem 'The Listeners' by Walter de la Mare. The majority of these students are confident performers on a variety of orchestral instruments and guitars.

155. Teaching and learning at both key stages is satisfactory overall. Teachers have sufficient knowledge and understanding of their subject, and practical expertise in music for the demands of the curriculum. They plan their lessons well and generally the methods they use within the classroom are appropriate for the students. As a result students learn satisfactorily and make progress. On one occasion, however, time was lost through whole class activities when group and individual work would have allowed students to solve their problems in performance. In a Year 8 lesson learning to play 'Love me Tender' in three parts, students had to wait while other parts were rehearsed. Teachers manage students satisfactorily and as a result students behave in class. In some lessons students are allowed too much time for activities, learning is slow and there is limited attainment. Teachers set homework effectively and regularly to extend work started in the classroom. Sometimes teachers make their own time available to students so that they can practise on school instruments. Although students' attitudes to music are satisfactory overall only a

small number choose to take the subject at GCSE. This is a focus of attention for the department at present. In some lessons teaching is very good or excellent. In these lessons the pace and challenge transform learning and students make very good physical and creative effort when playing and composing; interest and concentration is very high and is maintained throughout the lesson. Assessment in these lessons is very effective and positive, enabling students to understand what a good performance is and to talk confidently about their own performances and those of fellow students.

156. Students with special needs make satisfactory progress and often achieve successfully in a practical situation as shown by a young drummer in Year 8. Students with behavioural problems need support in these lessons.

157. The curriculum now allows for integration of all musical skills. Schemes of work are being revised to match the new National Curriculum. It is not clear yet how progression will be achieved. There are few opportunities to develop spiritual and moral awareness through music. Social development is well provided for in group work and extra curricular activities, such as the wind band and choir. The music students listen to and perform promotes good cultural awareness. Management of the department is tentative and lacks confidence. Although standards have been maintained since the last inspection, great determination and drive is now required to bring teaching and learning up to the standards of the best in the school.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

158. Overall standards in physical education are in line with and sometimes above national expectations.

159. By the end of Key Stage 3 standards of overall fitness for girls and boys are above average. Their skills in games are variable according to prior experience. For example, standards in boys' rugby are good and most boys in one group showed a good understanding of the principles of 'defending'. By contrast girls with only a few lessons experience in badminton do not reach similar standards. Within the key stage both girls in Year 7 netball and boys in games skills demonstrate a good standard of knowledge about these activities as a clear result of the increased emphasis placed on teaching this aspect of the subject.

160. At Key Stage 4 standards are satisfactory although in current examination groups' standards are higher. Work in folders demonstrates high levels of knowledge and understanding of 'sport and society' and complements skill in physical education. Most students demonstrate their keen awareness of the influential role played by the media in reporting on sports events.

161. Most students enjoy their PE lessons and respond positively to their teachers. Lessons begin with clear explanations or demonstrations that set the objectives for each lesson demonstrating how well all teachers know and understand their subject. They plan very well and in most lessons devise challenging and vigorous activities setting high expectations of all students. Questions are posed expertly to check on learning and skills are broken down into smaller units enabling students to recognise the components of more complex activities, for example the principles of 'defending' in games. By setting learning targets in this way students gain a clear understanding of what needs to be done in order to improve. Most teaching is delivered in an enthusiastic and energetic style and this engages most students eagerly in their lessons providing a strong framework for raising standards. There is a small minority of students, mainly, although not exclusively, older girls who

demonstrate disaffection through persistent non-participation in physical education. The overall quality of teaching is never less than satisfactory, much of it is good or very good and some is occasionally outstanding. In consequence most learning is good. Most students behave maturely, co-operate well and work safely in response to the proper emphasis placed on these aspects by their teachers.

162. The requirements of the National Curriculum are met at both key stages. There is balance and breadth and the programmes of 'games skills' and 'health related exercise' in Year 7 are a clear indication of how the department is dealing with the varied experience of its students prior to entry. The records obtained through the assessment process will provide a sound platform on which to plan to meet learning needs in Key Stage 3 and subsequently Key Stage 4. Currently the documentation of the schemes of work and programmes of study needs considerable attention to bring them up to date. The department has not enjoyed stability in either management or the deployment of specialist staff in recent years. The newly appointed head of department already ensures its smooth day-to-day running and, together with a relatively new team of teachers, has clear plans for the development needed to sustain and improve upon existing standards. Specialist facilities for PE are adequate although the sports hall is dull and depressing and sometimes dirty. Its location, across a road from the main school site, coupled with the need of students and staff to approach it via the school's access to vehicles gives cause for serious concern for the safety of all. The matter should be urgently addressed. Resources for learning are insufficient in quantity and quality although current levels of funding are adequate.

163. Since the last inspection standards have been maintained and the current standards of teaching and the potential shown in management are strengths that will ensure improvements in standards overall and especially at Key Stage 4. With the support of senior managers in examining ways to reduce some students' disaffection the department is well placed to move forward.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

164. The attainment of the majority of students at the end of Key Stage 3 is average. Most students can offer personal opinions and observations in response to themes studied in class, can describe some of the main features of the religions they are studying and some ways in which religious belief influences the believer's everyday behaviour. They are weaker in giving reasons to explain the meaning of key features of religious belief and practice and their understanding of concepts is not always sufficiently secure for them to use specialist terms correctly and confidently. Above average attainment was observed in a Year 7 lesson where students were exploring the ideas of "Vision and Imagination". Many students were able to relate their own experiences to the theme, raise questions and suggest answers which indicated insight and maturity in responding to shared human experiences.

165. The attainment of most students at the end of Key Stage 4 is average. They can draw upon written materials to describe selected beliefs and practices in the religions they are studying and have a sound knowledge of some of the key features of these religions. They are weaker in using specialist language confidently and in relating specific themes studied to the wider context of the religious tradition. Attainment of students in the GCSE examination has improved in recent years. Results in the short course GCSE in the past two years have been in line with the national average for A*-C grades and A*-G. The performance of girls is better than boys and was significantly so in the most recent examination. The attainment on entry of the majority of students in religious education is

average; students are making appropriate progress at both key stages. The achievement of students with special needs in Key Stage 4 is better than expected.

166. The quality of learning in Key Stage 3 is good and in a majority of lessons in Key Stage 4 is very good. The great majority of students have a positive attitude to the subject, behave well in lessons and participate willingly in activities. The quality of learning in a Year 9 lesson on the relationship between religion and politics was enhanced by the students' evident involvement and interest, providing the basis for a good understanding of the theme and enabling them to explain confidently what they were doing. Most students are able to maintain concentration in lessons, persevere in the tasks set and are consolidating and extending their knowledge of the religious traditions studied. They respond particularly well to questions related to human experience and many are willing to express personal views when these themes are discussed in class.

167. The quality of teaching in Key Stage 3 is good and at Key Stage 4 is very good. There are no unsatisfactory lessons. Teachers are well qualified and enthusiastic, plan lessons carefully and provide a secure environment which encourages students to express and share personal views and opinions. Most lessons are purposeful and expectations of students are clearly expressed. Very good teaching was observed in a Year 11 lesson in which a majority of students had special needs. A lively and engaging start to the lesson helped students to recall previous learning in an interesting way and careful development of the lesson helped them to extend their knowledge of Jewish belief and practice. Good learning aids and structured written exercises enabled these students to achieve well in relation to the aims of the syllabus and better than expected in relation to their abilities. In a small minority of lessons in Key Stage 3 whole class activities lack focus on the main theme of the lesson, discussion is carried forward only by a small number of students and hurried conclusions leave insufficient time to clarify and reinforce learning, especially of concepts. Assessment of students' work is generally thorough and teachers make helpful comments on students' written work. The standard of marking and the quality of comment, however, is not consistent across the department. The subject is making a valuable contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development both through the world faiths curriculum and the opportunities given to students to reflect on significant aspects of human experience, although there are few planned visits to places of religious importance or links with religious communities.

168. An experienced, committed teacher provides strong and clear leadership for the subject and all teachers have an evident enthusiasm for the subject which is communicated to the students. Statutory requirements are met and the curriculum implements the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. All students have opportunity to gain accreditation in the subject at Key Stage 4. A good range of resources supports learning and increasing use is being made of information technology, especially the Internet, to gain access to subject-specific learning materials. Improvements have been made since the last inspection in time allocation at Key Stage 4, in examination results at GCSE, in the subject-specific tasks set for students and in the quality of subject reports. Further improvement needs to be made in raising standards attained by boys at GCSE, in consistency of marking across the department at Key Stage 3, in the organisation of whole-class activities at Key Stage 3, in the development of students' conceptual understanding and use of specialist terminology and in the opportunity for visits and other ways of enhancing students' classroom experience.

169. This is a good department, making a significant contribution to students' development and the ethos of the school.