

INSPECTION REPORT

THORNHILL SECONDARY SCHOOL

Thornholme Road, Sunderland

LEA area: Sunderland

Unique reference number: 108860

Headteacher: Mr J Hallworth

Reporting inspector: Marion Thompson
T2626

Dates of inspection: 2 - 6 October 2000

Inspection number: 223884

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

© Crown copyright 2000

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 - 16

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Thornhill School
Thornholme Road
Sunderland

Postcode: SR2 7NA

Telephone number: 0191 553 7735

Fax number: 0191 553 7740

E-mail address: Thornhill@schools.sunderland.gov.uk

Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Councillor C Anderson

Date of previous inspection: 18 March 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Marion Thompson	Registered inspector		What sort of school is it?
			How well are pupils taught?
			How well is the school led and managed?
Dawn Lloyd	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal developments
			How well does the school care for its pupils?
			Community links and partnership
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Edward Wheatley	Team inspector	Science	How high are standards?
			The school's results and pupils' achievements.
Tony Barringer	Team inspector	English	
		EAL	
Henry Moreton	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Jerry Royle	Team inspector	Information Technology	
Roger Holmes	Team inspector	Design Technology	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
Arthur Harvey	Team inspector	Religious Education	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education
Eileen Parry	Team inspector	SEN	
Jim Edwards	Team inspector	Physical Education	
		PSHE	
Dennis Barry	Team inspector	GNVQ	
David Gaulton	Team inspector	Geography	
Geoffrey Kinder	Team inspector	Art	
Philip Priest	Team inspector	Music	
Charlotte Evers	Team inspector	History	
		Equal Opportunities	
Dorothy Barraclough	Team inspector	Modern Languages	

The inspection contractor was:

Peak Education Partnership
19 Huddersfield Road
Barnsley
S70 2LT

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
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
PART B: COMMENTARY	
HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?	12
The school's results and achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?	14
HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?	16
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?	19
HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS	20
HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?	21
WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	24
PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	25
PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	30

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Thornhill is a ten-form entry, co-educational comprehensive of 1,494 pupils, aged 11 – 16, situated in the Thornholme ward, near the centre of Sunderland. It has grown in size since the last inspection and is over-subscribed. Although the school is situated in an area of private residential homes, many pupils come from further afield. This includes the inner city area, where there is much local authority and rented housing, and where levels of unemployment are high. The percentage of pupils speaking English as an additional language (6.89%) is higher than in most schools, however, only one pupil is in need of additional support in English. The vast majority of these pupils are of Bangladeshi origin and have Sylheti as a first language.

The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals (29.37%) is above the national average. Fifteen per cent of pupils have been identified as having special educational needs, of whom 2.4% have statements. These figures are broadly in line with the average. This figure has risen since the last inspection.

The school population represents the whole ability range. However, attainment on entry to the school is below average. This was also the case at the time of the last inspection. Pupils from the nearby school for physically handicapped pupils, take some lessons at Thornhill.

The school has recently become involved in Excellence in the Cities and, from September 2000, has been developing three strands: gifted and talented pupils, learning mentors and the enhancement of the learning support unit. The newly appointed headteacher, previously deputy headteacher at the school, took up post in September 2000.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Thornhill is a good school, which continues to improve. The headteacher provides a clear sense of direction for the school, focussed on raising attainment. He is supported well by senior managers and the school staff. Teaching is good, purposeful and effective and the pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive. Relationships are good and characterised by mutual respect; the school ethos is caring and stable. Pupils make good progress throughout the school and standards at GCSE, whilst below the national average, are above average in comparison to similar schools, and rose again in 2000. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Standards of attainment in public tests and examinations are rising: they are above those of similar schools in English and mathematics at the end of Year 9, and in GCSE A*-G grades at the end of Year 11.
- The quality of teaching is good, and 20% is very good.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is managed very well.
- Leadership is good, and all staff support the drive to raise attainment.
- Pupils have positive attitudes to school, their behaviour is good and they are well motivated to learn. Relationships are very good; the school provides a purposeful and secure ethos for pupils.
- There are very strong and effective links with the local community and with other partners, which contribute to pupils' learning.
- The school has very good systems in place to ensure pupils' welfare, health and safety.

What could be improved

- Standards of literacy in order to help raise levels of attainment.
- Opportunities for independent learning.
- The balance of the curriculum offered to pupils at Key Stage 4. There is insufficient time for the teaching of some subjects and pupils' needs are not always met.
- The organisation and quality of provision for Personal Health and Social Education (PHSE).
- Statutory provision for a daily act of collective worship and coverage of dance and gymnastics in physical education for pupils aged 11-14 (Key Stage 3), where National Curriculum requirements are not met.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Improvements have been satisfactory since the last inspection in March 1996. There have been considerable improvements in the quality of the teaching, and in provision in design and technology. Levels of attendance have improved and levels of exclusions have dropped dramatically. Standards of achievement at GCSE have improved, including those of pupils in the middle ability range, and levels of numeracy within the school, whilst still in need of further improvement, have risen. Systems are now in place to ensure that all pupils at Stage 2 in the SEN code of practice have individual education plans, and all health and safety issues raised in the previous report have been addressed. The school does not yet fully meet the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship. There continues to be insufficient time allocated to personal health and social education at Key Stage 3.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 year olds based on GCSE examination results.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	D	C	D	B

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

Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is below average, and literacy skills are low. In the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, the proportion of pupils achieving level 5 or higher in English, mathematics and science was below average. The proportion obtaining level 6 or above was close to average in English and science, and below average in mathematics. Compared with similar schools, the performance of pupils was above average. The provisional results for 2000 show that the proportion of pupils achieving the average or higher levels has risen. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, the proportion of pupils obtaining five or more A*-C grades was below the national average, but close to the average for similar schools and above average in overall GCSE performance. Results were better than in 1998 and the 2000 results show a further improvement, with no significant difference between the performance of girls and boys. The school exceeded its targets for 2000.

The standard of work seen is average. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards in English are broadly average, although speaking skills are underdeveloped. Standards are below average in mathematics, although they are improving. In science, standards are broadly average. In all other subjects, the standards of work are broadly average, with the exception of design and technology, where standards are below average. By the end of Key Stage 4, standards are average overall, although in mathematics, they are below average. While standards are broadly average in design and technology, they are above average in information systems and below average in resistant materials. Pupils' achievements are generally satisfactory, supported by the focus on improving teaching and because a policy of providing individual support for underachieving pupils in Year 11 has been introduced. Nevertheless, there is some underachievement associated mainly with underdeveloped speaking and extended writing skills. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in lessons and very good progress when withdrawn for individual support.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils' attitudes to school are good. Pupils are well motivated and keen to do well.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is good in lessons and around the school.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are very good throughout the school, and contribute to pupils' learning. Pupils respect each other's opinions and assume responsibilities willingly.
Attendance	Most pupils enjoy school and attend regularly. Despite the strenuous efforts of the school, the level of absence for a few pupils is too high.

Pupils' attitudes and values are a particular strength of the school. Pupils work diligently and take a pride in their work. Their positive approach enhances their capacity to learn effectively.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is good throughout the school: 97 per cent of teaching is satisfactory or better; 70 per cent is good or better; and 20 per cent is very good. 3 per cent of teaching is unsatisfactory. The quality of teaching is a strength of the school and meets the needs of all pupils in most lessons. It is good in English, mathematics, science and all other subjects, except in design and technology and PHSE, where it is satisfactory. Most lessons are characterised by good planning, impressive subject knowledge, effective pupil management, good use of time, and well-chosen resources. Pupils respond positively, so that lessons are purposeful and learning is effective. In some lessons, pupils have few opportunities to work independently. The teaching of literacy is satisfactory, but in some lessons, pupils,

particularly the highest attainers, are not enabled to develop their ideas and views through discussion, and in some subjects, opportunities to express themselves in depth through extended writing are occasionally limited. The teaching of numeracy is satisfactory.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum is broad, but for a minority of pupils lacks balance, particularly at Key Stage 4. Provision for personal health and social education is unsatisfactory. Careers education and guidance is good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The school makes very good provision for pupils when they are withdrawn from lessons for specialist support and they are supported well in mainstream lessons.
Provision for pupils' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory; for moral development, it is good, and for social development, it is very good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school takes good care of its pupils' welfare, health and safety. Plans are in place to improve the monitoring of pupils' academic progress. The quality of pupils' annual reports is unsatisfactory because they do not consistently provide details of attainment and progress in the subjects pupils study.

There are very good systems in place to ensure pupils' welfare, health and safety. The house system operates very effectively. The planned programme for pupils is satisfactory overall, but in Years 10 and 11, there is insufficient time for the teaching of some subjects, and the needs of all pupils are not fully met. In Years 7 to 9, there is insufficient coverage of some aspects of gymnastics and dance to fulfil the requirements of the National Curriculum, and the school does not fully comply with the requirement to provide a collective act of worship each day. Whilst the school provides a wide range of cultural experiences for pupils, it does not increase consistently pupils' appreciation of ethnic minority culture in the community. The school works well with parents, but while parents are kept very well informed about pastoral issues, there is less emphasis on academic matters.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The newly appointed headteacher provides very good leadership. He is supported well by the deputy headteachers and staff.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are highly committed, well informed and work hard in the interests of the school. The decisions they take are cost effective

The school's evaluation of its performance	There is a regular and effective programme of monitoring and evaluation. Plans are in place to extend these further into a performance management system.
The strategic use of resources	The budget has been carefully managed. Resources have been deployed effectively.

The headteacher is providing a clear focus on raising attainment and successfully engaging the school community. Results continue to improve. Departments and the school house system are led well and teaching support staff work hard. Their commitment and abilities bring great benefits to the school. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory and staffing is good. Care is taken to ensure that the deployment of resources achieves the best value for the benefit of pupils. The school provides good value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school expects children to work hard. • The school is approachable. • The school is helping children to mature. • Children like school. • Pupils make good progress. • Teaching is good. • The school is well led and managed. • Behaviour is good. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental links. • The amount of work children receive, particularly homework. • Parents are well informed about how their child is getting on.

The inspection team strongly endorses the parents' positive views of the school, expressed through questionnaires and at the meeting with the registered inspector. Better quality reports on pupils' progress are needed to provide parents with more information about their children's progress.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1 Attainment on entry to the school is below average overall and there is a significant proportion of lower attaining pupils. This has been the pattern for several years. Literacy and numeracy skills are improving, but they are still below average.

2 In the end of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests in 1999, the proportion of pupils obtaining the average level 5 or higher was below average in English, mathematics and science. The proportion of pupils obtaining level 6 or higher was close to average in English and science, and below average in mathematics. Overall, results have improved as fast as results nationally over recent years, and have not changed significantly from the time of the last inspection. Compared with similar schools in 1999, results were above average overall, but better in English and mathematics than in science. The 2000 results indicate an increase in the proportion of pupils obtaining the average levels or higher.

3 In the 1999 GCSE examinations, 33% of pupils obtained five or more A*-C grades, which was below the national average, but better than in 1998 and average compared with similar schools. Ninety per cent of pupils obtained five or more A*-G grades, which was below average, but an improvement on the results of 1998. Compared with similar schools, the 1999 results were better than the average. In 2000, 43% of pupils obtained five or more A*-C grades and, although unvalidated nationally, this represents a significant improvement and exceeds the school's targets. Overall, GCSE results have improved since the last inspection. The performance of girls and boys was not significantly different in the 2000 GCSE examinations.

4 The standards of work seen are broadly average, although literacy skills are not well developed. By the end of Key Stage 3, in English, standards are average overall, although speaking skills are below average. In mathematics, standards are below average overall, although a small proportion of pupils have average or higher numeracy skills. A large proportion of pupils, however, have below average number skills. However, standards have improved substantially since the last inspection. In science standards of work are broadly average although practical skills are good. In all other subjects, levels of attainment are in line with national averages.

5 By the end of Key Stage 4, levels of attainment are broadly in line with expectations for pupils aged 16 years, although speaking and extended writing skills are below average. In English and science, pupils' levels of attainment are broadly average, with a significant small proportion of pupils performing at above average levels. In mathematics, attainment is below average, although numeracy skills are improving, but have not had an impact on the end of key stage results yet. In other subjects, levels of attainment are broadly average. Design and technology is the exception; attainment in information systems is above average, in textiles is broadly average, and in resistant materials is below average. The attainment of those pupils on General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) courses is broadly average. The school's recently introduced mentoring and target setting is starting to have a positive impact on standards, as is the focus on improving teaching.

6 Achievements are good overall because pupils start from a below average point and improve to being close to average. The achievement of middle attaining pupils, unsatisfactory at the time of the last inspection, is now satisfactory.

7 Mentoring of individual pupils in Key Stage 4 is having a positive effect on improving grades achieved at GCSE, especially in raising the proportion of C grades. However, there is some underachievement, seen in most subjects, but not predominantly in any single subject. There are not enough opportunities for pupils to talk or write independently in lessons or to undertake extended writing and this impedes the progress of some pupils – they do not learn to express their knowledge and understanding clearly.

8 Pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are below average on entry to the school. Although there is a proportion of pupils in both key stages whose skills in reading are relatively weak, in all subjects, pupils' reading skills are adequate to support their learning. Standards of writing are broadly in line with the average. Written work is presented carefully, and standards of spelling have improved since the last inspection. There are insufficient opportunities for extended writing. The majority of pupils listen with a good level of attention. The standard of speaking is below that found nationally, and pupils, especially the highest attainers, are often not comfortable in developing their ideas through discussion; some pupils are inclined to talk indistinctly.

9 Standards in numeracy, whilst substantially improved since the last inspection, are below the average. Use of ICT across the curriculum, at both key stages, is broadly in line with national expectation.

10 Pupils with special needs are making good progress through the good quality of the teaching. Some pupils, who are based at the special school next door, attend a variety of courses, including GCSE, and are enabled to achieve grades in subjects that the special school could not provide.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

11 Pupil's attitudes to learning, their behaviour in lessons and around the school, and their response to the school's provision for their personal development are all good and occasionally very good.

12 Most pupils enjoy coming to school and have positive attitudes to their work. They are well motivated and keen to do well. In lessons, they show high levels of interest and enthusiasm. They are attentive, concentrate on their work, and apply themselves diligently to the tasks that are set for them. They take a clear pride in producing their best work.

13 Behaviour in lessons is almost always good and occasionally very good or excellent. For example, pupils in a physical education lesson behaved exceptionally well when their attention was totally focussed on improving their soccer skills. In science, they undertake work carefully and safely and in mathematics they work quietly and purposefully.

14 Relationships between pupils are very good. This is reflected in the sensible and purposeful way that they work together in pairs or groups. They co-operate well on practical tasks and in team activities, taking turns fairly and listening thoughtfully to the opinions of other members of the group. The very good relationships that exist between pupils and adults play a large part in consolidating their knowledge and understanding in lessons, because pupils show clearly the respect that they have for their teachers and are eager to please them. Pupils agree that one of the strengths of the school is its friendliness. Everyone mixes well together and there is no evidence of sexism or racism. There are occasional instances of bullying, but these are handled promptly and effectively by staff.

15 Behaviour around the school is usually orderly and controlled. Sometimes, there are examples of boisterousness on the narrow staircases, but on the whole, pupils are conscious of the needs of others and move about carefully, under the watchful eyes of the staff on duty.

The condition of the building and equipment shows that pupils have respect for their environment; for example, there is minimal litter, no graffiti and a set of models on display in a history base have been well looked after. There are many examples in religious education and in English lessons of how pupils show consideration for the beliefs and values of others, during discussions of sensitive issues such as life and death, prejudice and discrimination and the religious beliefs of other cultures.

16 Pupils respond well to the opportunities that exist for them to take responsibility but sometimes do not have enough opportunities to be responsible for their own learning. Year 11 pupils proudly undertake their duties as school and house officers, appreciating how valuable these experiences will be for the development of their confidence and maturity.

17 Levels of attendance are now around the national average. Most pupils enjoy coming to school, and show their commitment by their attitudes to learning and their willingness to take part in the wide range of extra-curricular activities available for them. Despite this levels of absence for a small minority of pupils are still too high. The school is making strenuous efforts to convince all pupils and their parents of the importance of regular attendance, and to make them aware that absences from school are having a detrimental effect on the educational standards of the absentees.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

18 Teaching is good overall: 97 per cent of teaching is satisfactory or better; 70 per cent is good or better; and 20 per cent is very good. 3 per cent of teaching is unsatisfactory. The quality of teaching is a strength of the school and meets the needs of all pupils in most lessons. It is good in English, mathematics, science and all other subjects, except in design and technology, where it is satisfactory, and in PHSE, where the quality of teaching is adversely affected by the way the subject is organised.

19 In almost all subject areas, pupils experience some very challenging and exciting lessons on subjects as diverse as creating linked movements in Year 7 dance lessons, making deductions from photographs of Egyptian life in Year 10 history lessons, and exploring challenging philosophical issues in Year 9 religious education. Pupils respond by engaging enthusiastically in lessons which leads to progress in learning. Teaching methodology has been strengthened and developed by a carefully organised programme of lesson monitoring and well structured feedback, which has helped staff to reflect positively and seriously about their own teaching. This has clearly been effective in bringing about improvement since the last inspection.

20 Most lessons in the school are characterised by certain good features, the first of which is that teachers demonstrate impressive knowledge of, and interest in, their subject. They manage to convey their enthusiasm to the pupils, who respond by working hard and showing interest. In these lessons, teachers are very clear about what pupils should be learning, and lessons are planned carefully and systematically, taking into account the needs of all of the pupils and guided by subject schemes of work. Pupils understand the demands made on them and respond positively. In music lessons, for example, work is organised in well ordered units, with plans and materials presented so that children of all abilities can take part, and in art, very good planning is a key strength of the department. Generally, teachers ensure that the work presents an appropriate level of challenge for all pupils, including the middle range, who were seen to be underachieving in some lessons in the previous report. Teachers use a well-chosen range of resources to motivate pupils and basic skills are taught effectively.

21 Relationships between pupils and staff are good, and pupil management is a strength of teaching, for example in geography and information technology, where pupils are handled sensitively and effectively. Good relationships enable teachers to establish a purposeful atmosphere in lessons and teach at a brisk pace, which enables pupils to learn effectively. Pupils make good progress in their learning, through behaving well, concentrating hard, and making effective use of their time.

22 Teachers are aware of pupils' progress in learning and take account of it when they teach, for example, by changing the pace and activities in a Year 10 PHSE lesson on citizenship, when pupils found the concepts difficult to grasp.

23 Most teachers organise lessons effectively and use a range of appropriate methodologies. However, in some lessons, for example in art, mathematics, design and technology, and French the teachers offer too few opportunities for pupils to take the initiative in their learning and to demonstrate responsibility. In these lessons, pupils tend to be constrained. When these opportunities are provided pupils are very capable, for example, they plan their own work experience placements.

24 In most lessons, there is a good level of attention directed at the reinforcement of the basic skills of reading, listening and writing, and new technical language is introduced carefully, as in mathematics. However, at times, pupils, and particularly the highest attainers, are not sufficiently encouraged to extend and develop their answers to questions in class, or challenged to express themselves more clearly and in more depth during class discussions. In these lessons pupils are reluctant to talk or give very brief answers. Pupils would benefit from more opportunities to discuss their own work and that of others in art, to describe their personal responses to music, or to produce spontaneous language in French. When there is an insistence on a high quality response, for example demanding questions in a Year 9 geography lesson on the tropical rainforest, or in the best science lessons, pupils respond well. There are also insufficient opportunities in a number of subjects, for example mathematics, music and geography, for pupils to develop their work further through extended and independent writing.

25 The teaching of numeracy is satisfactory, but, in a minority of lessons, teachers miss opportunities to develop number work. Pupils take a pride in their work and present it well. The use of information technology in subject teaching is satisfactory. Teachers and pupils are confident and it effectively supports learning in most curriculum areas. The new network system, which will allow access to the National Grid for Learning in every teaching room, will provide further opportunities for greater use.

26 The teaching of pupils with special needs throughout the school is good. Teachers use a variety of ways to ensure that pupils are included in lessons, including managing behaviour well and producing materials with different levels of reading difficulty. The teaching of those members of staff who specifically teach pupils with special needs is very good. Their deployment to the lower sets means that pupils are taught by staff who have an excellent understanding of their needs. Many of these pupils have behaviour difficulties, which teachers and assistants manage very well, keeping a calm working atmosphere and handling challenging behaviour with firmness and humour. This keeps pupils at their tasks and enables learning to continue. Teaching in the individual support unit is very good. There is good liaison with subject teachers to ensure that pupils follow a timetable and content is as close to the main class as possible. The very calm response to the pupils helps pupils to remain calm as well. Learning support assistants play a substantial role in helping individuals, for example in the individual support unit and in the special reading sessions during registration time.

27 The very few pupils of Asian heritage who need help in understanding English are supported well by the bilingual assistant, who sensitively provides a mixture of independence and of interpretation.

28 Good teaching and pupils' enthusiasm and commitment enable pupils to make good progress in their learning. They work well in collaboration with others and in individual work.

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

29 At Key Stage 3, all pupils follow the same curriculum, which covers the full range of National Curriculum subjects and religious education. The time allocated to each subject is sufficient to cover the work, and there is an appropriate emphasis on the core subjects, with English receiving most time, followed by mathematics and science. There is insufficient coverage of aspects of gymnastics and dance in physical education to meet National Curriculum requirements. In Year 7 pupils are taught in groups that have been selected based on their performance in English, mathematics and science. This means that pupils with an aptitude for a particular subject, for example art, will not necessarily be in the top set for that subject unless they are also good at English, mathematics and science. In Years 8 and 9, pupils are set within individual subjects, except that pupils are in the same groups for history and geography and for art, music and religious studies. Nevertheless, the system works satisfactorily and enables work to be matched to the needs of pupils within each group.

30 Pupils with special educational needs are identified correctly and supported well. The curriculum they receive is matched well to their individual needs, and concentrates on basic skills that will enable them to move forwards in other subjects.

31 Personal health and social education is taught to pupils on a rota, which provides only one lesson every three weeks. This is not sufficient time to cover all the aspects of this important area of pupils' learning, and the arrangement itself sends the message that it is less important than other lessons. This was identified in the last inspection and remains an issue. It has been identified by the senior management team as a priority within the school development plan.

32 The curriculum at Key Stage 4 is broad, ensuring that pupils continue to study English, mathematics, science, information technology, French, physical education and religious education. They must also choose a technology subject and a humanity subject, and another option to balance their other choices. As pupils are able to follow a GCSE course in the two hours per week allocated to compulsory physical education and religious education, they can achieve up to fourteen passes at GCSE. However, the time allocated for the teaching of GCSE religious education limits the standards that can be achieved, and pupils on the GCSE physical education course have limited time to cover the full requirements of the National Curriculum. In addition, potential linguists cannot take a second foreign language. Teachers voluntarily teach German as an extra lesson out of school time, but this is not available every year. Also, a number of pupils, for whom double science is considered unsuitable, are allocated to an art option, which they have not chosen: the attainment of many of these pupils is below average. The school has only just introduced work-related courses, with GNVQ leisure and tourism, and health and social care having started this year. It is planned to introduce other GNVQ courses next year, including engineering, but at the moment there are too few options for pupils as an alternative to GCSE courses. The school also misses the opportunity to provide accreditation for the language skills of pupils of Bangladeshi descent.

33 Pupils at Key Stage 4 are taught personal, social and health education by a specialist team of teachers for one period each week. This includes sex and drugs education. A range

of cross-curricular themes is taught in four-week modules. These arrangements do not allow relationships to be established between pupils and their teachers, especially when covering sensitive issues such as those that occur in sex education. In the lessons seen at Key Stage 4, covering contraception, abortion and euthanasia, teachers met pupils for the first time and found difficulty in establishing relationships to cover these issues in a mature way.

34 Strategies for the teaching of literacy throughout the school are good for reading and listening. In some subject areas, strategies for extended writing and speaking are inadequate, and there is currently no policy for literacy. Strategies for the teaching of numeracy are satisfactory and pupils' skills are improving, but in some subject areas, there is a need for more planned opportunities.

35 The planned use of information communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum is satisfactory overall. Generally, teachers are confident with the use of ICT, and a number of departments make effective use within their subject areas to support learning. They include use in design and technology to design electronic test circuits, religious education and history, using CD ROMs for research, in music to support composition, and good use of a drawing programme in art. There is potential for even greater use when the new school-wide network, which allows access to the National Grid for Learning in every teaching area, becomes live in autumn 2000.

36 In addition to the planned curriculum, the school provides a very good range of extra activities for pupils. There is a homework club, which is open to all pupils, and many subjects provide revision lessons for pupils in Year 11 before they take their GCSE examinations. Teachers also run clubs in their subject areas, for example IT, or special skills such as calligraphy, so that pupils can follow their individual interests. There is a strong programme of sporting activities for boys and girls, made even more valuable by the involvement of other pupils in training and organising teams for younger pupils. Music is also well represented and the school has a good reputation locally for its performances. Educational visits play an important part in a number of subjects, including theatre trips in English and fieldwork in geography, although more use should be made of visits in RE. Where available many pupils take advantage of these extra opportunities; they make an important contribution to enhancing the richness and quality of the curriculum.

37 Careers education and guidance begin in Year 9, when pupils choose their options for Key Stage 4. In Years 10 and 11, careers education is taught effectively by heads of house. Work experience takes place for all Year 11 pupils for one week. Pupils start the process of planning and preparation for work experience, using their initiative and knowledge of local employment information. The work experience programme is highly valued by all pupils and well supported by local employers.

38 There is a wide range of links with external organisations, which makes a very positive contribution to the way pupils learn. Local businesses and professional organisations provide volunteer mentors, work experience placements, help with mock interviews and arrange special courses and funding. There are also very strong links with the college of further education, which give pupils a good insight into the varied opportunities, both academic and vocational, that are open to them after school. These strong partnerships with outside agencies are designed to raise the expectations of pupils, to promote their self-esteem and show them an outlook on life that may be different from anything that they have previously experienced. The adults involved in these initiatives are very committed to helping the school, and talk enthusiastically about the successes they have had in improving young people's attitudes to learning, in teaching them about citizenship and in motivating them to aim higher.

39 The school also enjoys fruitful relationships with the feeder primaries and a number of special schools. A programme of visits and open days ensures that the transition to

secondary school is easy for new entrants. The adjacent school for physically handicapped pupils has a particularly strong relationship with Thornhill. Many pupils are able to join classes at the secondary school and follow examination courses such as history, geography, modern foreign languages and science, while Thornhill pupils make return visits to learn how they can work with pupils who have special needs. This strong partnership serves to break down barriers and contributes to pupils' personal development by promoting mutual understanding and tolerance.

40 Overall, provision for pupils' spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory, pupils' moral development is good, and social development is very good.

41 Since the last inspection, the provision for collective daily acts of worship for all pupils has not improved significantly. All pupils attend two assemblies per week. During the inspection week, some did not fulfil statutory requirements, although the content had strong moral and social elements.

42 In English, history and religious education, pupils gain insights into beliefs, values and human emotions. Pupils have opportunity to learn about such themes as death, ambition and the relationship between beliefs and behaviour in Macbeth, Roman and American Indian religion, and the expression of non-material aspects of human personality in worship, symbolism and ceremonies. However, some subjects miss opportunities to contribute to pupils' spiritual development.

43 The provision for pupils' moral development is good and effective. Pupils are helped to understand the difference between right and wrong behaviour, and are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions. The school has a clear code of conduct, the Thornhill Code, which supports positive behaviour. Pupils understand it, together with the system of rewards and sanctions. The code of conduct, the policies on bullying and racism, and the emphasis on respect towards other people are effective. They contribute to the good level of acceptable behaviour. Many subjects explore the moral aspects of such themes as the holocaust, abortion, crime and punishment, the need for rules on the sports field and in society, genetic engineering and the contrasts between the life of a child in Lima and London. Moral problems are sometimes explored in assemblies and tutor groups.

44 The provision for pupils' social development is very good. All subjects offer pupils opportunities to develop and practise basic social skills. Many pupils co-operate with their teachers in class, on visits and in musical, sporting and drama activities. Pupils have opportunities to take responsibility. Some become school prefects, house committee and games representatives, school officers, chairpersons, reading mentors and games captains. Others assist in the library and in reception.

45 Pupils are sensitive to the needs of people in the wider community and demonstrate this by organising and supporting initiatives to raise money for the work of a range of charities such as St. Benedict's Hospice, Guide Dogs for the Blind, Cancer Research and a local neo-natal unit. In the recent past, pupils have provided over three hundred Christmas parcels for children in Eastern Europe and £600 was raised for the island of Monserrat. In personal and social education, pupils learn about the privileges and responsibilities of citizenship in a democratic society.

46 The provision for pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. In English, history, music and religious education, and in a varied range of extra-curricular clubs, students learn about British culture, past and present. First-hand experience of French culture is gained through visits to France. Pupils also make visits to theatres, churches and centres of cultural interest within this country. Actors have visited the school to perform and work with pupils.

47 Pupils are alerted to non-western cultures in design and technology, geography, history, English and religious education. They learn about the contribution of several cultures to aspects of American and Indian life, life in Nigeria and Ghana, and the influence of beliefs on dress, food and behaviour in four religions. Respect and tolerance for the beliefs and culture of others underlie the provision. Some subjects, and the school as a whole, could do more to increase pupils' appreciation of ethnic minority cultures in the community by, for example, visits to a mosque, synagogue, mandir or gurdwara, and by celebrating in school the contributions and achievements of non-western cultures.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

48 The school has very good systems in place to ensure pupils' welfare, health and safety.

49 Arrangements for pastoral care are well organised and very effective. The operation of the house and tutor group systems enables staff to monitor all aspects of pupils' personal development so that appropriate action can be taken if problems are identified. Staff know pupils very well and pupils feel confident to approach them with concerns of any kind. There are very good procedures for dealing with routine first aid and medical care, and arrangements for child protection are documented and co-ordinated well by the designated person. There is a comprehensive health and safety policy, which is carefully followed by staff. In lessons, great care is taken to observe safe practices, particularly in higher risk areas such as science, design technology and physical education, and levels of supervision around the building throughout the day do much to minimise the problems caused by congestion in corridors and on staircases. The use of security cameras not only ensures pupils' safety, but also helps to deter any possibility of poor behaviour around the school site.

50 Procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance are good and improving. The recent appointment of a school-based attendance officer, who can respond swiftly to referrals, is already proving its worth in dealing with individual cases of absence, although it is too soon to see any statistical evidence of improved attendance rates.

51 Arrangements for monitoring and promoting good behaviour, as outlined in the Thornhill Code, are consistently applied by staff and are clearly effective in creating a calm working atmosphere. Pupils understand and accept the rules they are expected to follow and are motivated by the rewards they can achieve. The number of exclusions has reduced considerably since the last inspection. Occasional examples of bullying are handled sensitively by staff and there is no evidence of sexism or racism.

52 The senior management team is aware that there is currently no uniform system for monitoring pupils' academic progress. Data about pupils' performance from all subject areas, and from tests including public tests and examinations, is analysed in order to set targets, to help pupils in Year 11 to improve their performance and to allocate pupils to teaching groups on intake. The school is currently extending this analysis to a more sophisticated level so that group tutors can monitor more closely pupils' academic performance throughout their school career and help pupils to set learning targets. Samples of pupils' work are monitored on a regular basis by senior staff. Mentoring for Year 11 has resulted in much improved examination results. In Years 10 and 11, mentoring by volunteers from industry and commerce concentrates successfully on raising pupils' self-esteem and expectations, but is not available to all pupils. Monitoring of academic progress in Key Stage 3 is not yet used as a basis for providing support and guidance to pupils, but will shortly be provided by group tutors. They will be assisted in this by the provision of better quality data on pupils' achievement and potential.

53 In all subject departments, appropriate records are kept and assessment procedures are good. Information is used by teachers to help them to plan future lessons, with good examples of this in mathematics and in religious education, which included pupils with special educational needs. Marking is at least satisfactory and consistent with departmental policy. Teachers often give pupils good information about how well they are doing in comments at the end of written work, especially in geography at Key Stage 4, some lessons in information technology and music. Additionally, in information technology, pupils are given clear guidance about their literacy skills. A consistent feature of lessons is that teachers tell pupils what they are doing well and where they need to improve.

54 Annual reports to parents comply broadly with statutory requirements. However, there are often no specific comments on pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills, and the overall quality is unsatisfactory.

55 Procedures for identifying and assessing pupils with special educational needs are good. Individual education plans are in place and progress is carefully monitored. Pupils and parents are closely involved. Reviews are undertaken regularly and external agencies involved where necessary. Pupils are placed in the individual support unit on the basis of their need, and the range of pupils who have attended in the four weeks of the unit's existence reflects the individual nature of the assessment.

56 The senior management team uses assessment data to monitor the performance of subject departments and to produce a range of analyses for heads of departments. This work is being extended and developed.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

57 Since the last inspection, the school has continued its efforts to build a positive partnership with parents and has plans to intensify these by strategies such as improving the number and timing of parents' evenings, changing the way that parents are notified of events, and offering advice on how parents can support their children's learning at home. Most parents are supportive of the school and are pleased with its achievements. They think that pupils are expected to work hard and are making good progress. They find it easy to approach the school with queries and are very happy with the way they are kept informed about matters affecting their sons or daughters.

58 A significant minority of those who returned the pre-inspection questionnaire or attended the meeting do not feel well informed about what pupils are learning, do not think they have the right amount of work to do, particularly homework, and do not feel that the school works closely with parents. The inspection found that, while parents are kept very well informed about pastoral issues, there is sometimes insufficient emphasis on academic matters. For instance, there is only one opportunity each year for parents to discuss progress with teachers. The quality of school reports is unsatisfactory. Comments are very general and it is often not possible to identify the subjects they are describing. They tend to concentrate on attitudes rather than explaining what pupils know, understand and can do.

59 The inspection team found no evidence to support the contention that the school does not work closely with parents. The school works closely with the parents of pupils with special needs. They are included in review processes and every effort is made to take account of their views. There is close consultation with parents of pupils placed in the individual support unit about what is happening, and what the next steps should be to enable their children to return to mainstream lessons.

60 The school provides a broad range of written information for parents, much of which is attractive and useful. Reply slips on letters home, and on school reports, provide an avenue for parents to let the school know their views. Pastoral staff make regular contact to discuss individual problems such as attendance, behaviour, or under-achievement, and to give positive messages when pupils have done well. Written information about the curriculum for new entrants, and about option choices for Year 9 pupils, is provided annually, while homework is set appropriately in line with the school's policy. Parents' involvement in the life of the school, and the support they give to pupils' learning, vary greatly. Many parents take a keen interest. They check and sign homework diaries, attend parents' evenings and are supportive and co-operative when staff ask for their help in dealing with problems. Others show little interest in what happens at school, although they are keen to support events such as music and drama performances. There is no parent teacher association to support the school with fund-raising or organising social events. As yet, the parents of children of Bangladeshi origin have very limited involvement in school life and the school's attempts to forge closer links with them are at a very early stage. The recent appointment of a Bangladeshi member of staff, who can help with language difficulties, is a very positive benefit.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

61 The school was effectively led at the time of the previous inspection. An action plan, based on the key issues for action identified in the last inspection report, was drawn up, and effective steps were taken to ensure the plan's successful implementation in most areas. The headteacher retired recently. The newly appointed headteacher is providing a clear sense of direction for the school and is engaging governors, staff and pupils in a strong and clearly focussed drive to continue to raise standards of attainment for all pupils. The current school development plan sets out appropriate priorities for the school, skilfully adapting national priorities to improve provision. Plans detail the means of achieving them; the plan is linked to the budget and sets out timescales, who is responsible for implementation, and the intended impact on teaching and learning. It is an effective tool for the management of the school.

62 The new senior management team, comprising of the headteacher and two recently appointed deputies, and the larger leadership group (senior management team, site manager, examinations officer, head of guidance, and teacher with responsibility for social inclusion), meet regularly to exchange information, monitor the school's performance and plan for continuing improvement. Middle managers, including heads of department and house heads provide strong and effective leadership and management of their areas. The school has good monitoring strategies in place; teaching is monitored regularly on a systematic basis and useful feedback is provided to teachers in a way that enables them to improve, although there is no appraisal system in place. The monitoring system provides a sound basis for the introduction of a school-wide performance management system.

63 Provision for pupils with special educational needs is managed very well. The policy and procedures meet the requirements of the Code of Practice. The weakness regarding inadequate individual education plans at Stage 2, which was reported in the previous inspection, has been dealt with. Links throughout the school help to keep special needs a whole-school issue. For example, special needs staff teach lower sets, there are regular meetings with heads of house, and the special educational needs register and individual education plans are circulated widely.

64 The school has used the special grant for social inclusion to create an individual support unit. A successful start has been made. The unit provides a good quality learning environment. In the four weeks that it has been open, staff have established a very calm

atmosphere where pupils can feel safe and supported. There is a clear philosophy, which is aimed at giving a small number of youngsters support to return to mainstream lessons. Their reintegration is gradual and provision takes account of a wide range of needs.

65 The members of the school governing body know the school well and have a clear understanding of how effectively the school has addressed the issues raised in the previous inspection report. They also have a sound grasp of how results at GCSE and in national tests compare with national averages and the results in other local schools. Governors demonstrate commitment to the school by, for example, taking an active role in the 'back to work' interviews and absence panels following absence, or acting as mentors to pupils. They are well informed about the priorities identified in the school development plan and offer the headteacher and senior management team an appropriate level of support and challenge. Unfortunately, the school has been unable to recruit a governor from the Bangladeshi community, which represents seven percent of children in school.

66 Financial management and control in the school is good. Governors receive clear and detailed information about the budget and they allocate funding to support priorities identified in the school development plan. Good estimates are made of how the budget will vary in the future, based on projected pupil numbers. This process has allowed the governors to make effective use of a small budget surplus to cover temporary deficits. Spending decisions are made prudently and are aimed at achieving higher standards and a better quality of education. Governors ensure that the funds are used as intended and receive general reports on progress, but not on the direct outcomes of their spending decisions, for example the effect on pupils' learning and achievement of extra IT equipment. Day-to-day financial control is very effective and there are efficient systems in place to ensure that the school's budget runs smoothly. The school is considering adopting the LEA IT system and is increasing the use of IT to store information and make it available to the appropriate users.

67 The school's budget is almost exactly the national average for the number of pupils it has on roll. Considerable efforts have been made to ensure that it is spent so as to achieve best value. Contracts for services such as cleaning and maintenance have been received and they have only been let after careful consideration of cost and quality. Considering the quality of education provided by the school and the progress that pupils make, it gives good value for money.

68 Governors share the school's commitment to improving standards and are keen to prioritise and support activities like the extensive mentoring programmes, summer schools, and other activities designed to promote a learning culture and enhance pupils' self-esteem.

69 There are sufficient appropriately qualified and experienced teaching and support staff to provide an effective curriculum. The quality of the teaching makes a positive contribution to the good progress made by pupils. The level of technical and administrative support is satisfactory for the demands of the curriculum, and provides good service to the school. There is good support for the teaching of swimming. The provision of learning support assistants is good and they work effectively with teachers to support pupils with special educational needs.

70 The induction of newly qualified teachers into the school is good. The well-structured programme ensures that their performance is carefully monitored and provides them with effective guidance and a good range of training opportunities, both inside and outside the school. There is an appropriate induction programme for other newly-appointed teachers. Provision for teachers' professional development is good and is linked to priorities in school and department plans, as well as to individual needs.

71 Accommodation issues raised at the last inspection have been dealt with and are now satisfactory. The site comprises several buildings and getting around the school is complicated by the number of narrow stairways and corridors within them. A one-way system goes some way to reducing these difficulties, but in some areas two-way traffic inevitably remains. There are lifts and ramps for disabled pupils. The premises are well maintained by the caretaking and cleaning staff.

72 The buildings are in good condition. Grassed areas near the school are well looked after by the caretaking staff and the extensive playing fields are well maintained by an outside contractor. The programme of installing lighting in the outside areas continues, and this, and security cameras preserve the good quality of the school's environment. There is one exit on to a main road from the grounds, which becomes congested at the end of school. The school and the local authority are looking at various measures to combat the dangers this presents.

73 Accommodation is generally satisfactory and in some cases it is good. Display in classrooms is usually satisfactory, and in food technology and religious education it is good. There is some shortage of specialist accommodation for performing arts, music and drama. Accommodation for the special educational needs department is good. A major deficiency is the library, where space is woefully inadequate for a school of this size. This severely restricts learning opportunities for pupils. The attractive main school hall is small for assembly purposes, seating about one quarter of the school only. Overall, the design and maintenance of the accommodation contribute positively to pupils' learning. Whilst many shortcomings in other subject areas identified in the last report have been dealt with, those in the arts and library provision remain.

74 Resources for learning are satisfactory overall and spending on learning resources has risen over the last two years from 6.1% of the school's budget to 6.6%. There is a good system for allocation of capitation to departments, through a deputy headteacher. All curriculum areas, including special educational needs, are at least adequately resourced with equipment and materials for pupils' learning. Religious education, physical education and geography have particularly good specialist equipment and materials, while art and music are also strong in the provision of information communication technology for their subjects. The ratio of computers to pupils is good and has improved since the last inspection. All classrooms will shortly be linked to the National Grid for Learning. The school library has insufficient books and other materials because its accommodation is too small. Books and CD-ROMs do not represent the curriculum in an even way, so that some subjects such as history are much more strongly represented than others, such as design and technology. Currently the library is used well by pupils between lessons, and for some teaching.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

75 The school has done a great deal since the last inspection to assure that all of its work is aimed at raising standards achieved by the pupils and to provide a secure and stable environment that is conducive to learning. Much work has been done to motivate pupils of the average attainment range and those who have difficulties in adapting to school. Generally, the school has been successful in its work, is aware of the areas in need of improvement, and has produced a development plan that will further enhance its effectiveness. What the school now needs to do is:

- raise standards of attainment by:
 - developing and implementing a literacy policy that pays particular attention to improving oracy, particularly for the highest-attaining pupils
 - ensuring adequate opportunities in all subjects for the development of extended and independent writing
- review schemes of work to ensure more planned opportunities for independent learning;
- review the balance of the curriculum at Key Stage 4 to ensure adequate time for the teaching of all subjects and to ensure all pupils' needs are met;
- continue the review of the organisation of PHSE to ensure sufficient time for the subject and continuity of teaching.
- fulfil statutory duties by:
 - reviewing the scheme of work for gymnastics and dance at Key Stage 3, especially the provision for dance for boys in Year 9, to ensure pupils receive their full entitlement to the National Curriculum.
 - ensuring provision for a daily act of collective worship;

76 The following points, although not key issues, should also be considered for action in the school action plan:

- improve the quality of reports by ensuring that they give clearer information about what pupils know, understand and can do;
- ensure plans already being implemented to extend the system for monitoring pupils' progress more closely, setting individual pupil targets, and involving class tutors are implemented fully;
- continue implementing systems to improve pupil attendance.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	208
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	31

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
0%	20%	50%	27%	3%	0	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1494
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	451

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	36
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	197

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	27
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	19

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	9
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.9
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	141	154	295

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	64 (103)	79 (85)	63 (83)
	Girls	103 (88)	82 (73)	61 (69)
	Total	167 (192)	161 (158)	124
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	57 (65)	55 (54)	42 (51)
	National	63 (65)	64 (59)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	20 (39)	27 (30)	17 (27)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	65 (110)	73 (75)	78 (86)
	Girls	104 (106)	83 (69)	81 (76)
	Total	169 (216)	156 (144)	159 (162)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	58 (70)	52 (49)	54 (54)
	National	64 (61)	64 (64)	60 (61)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	25 (40)	24 (19)	26 (26)
	National	31 (30)	37 (37)	28 (30)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	1999	138	117	255

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	47 (31)	123 (119)	136 (136)
	Girls	37 (40)	105 (99)	115 (113)
	Total	84 (71)	228 (218)	251 (249)
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	32.9 (26.3)	89.4 (79.6)	98 (91)
	National	46.6 (44.6)	90.0 (89.8)	95.8 ([])

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	33.3 (29.4)
	National	38 (36.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	84 (71)	33.3
	National		38.0

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	
Black – other	
Indian	
Pakistani	2
Bangladeshi	107
Chinese	4
White	1,378
Any other minority ethnic group	2

Exclusions in the last school year

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

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	91.53
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.3: 1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	12
Total aggregate hours worked per week	439

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74.6%
---	-------

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	22.8%
Key Stage 4	21.2%

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
----------------	-----------

	£
Total income	3,457,743
Total expenditure	3,427,740
Expenditure per pupil	2,294
Balance brought forward from previous year	90,000
Balance carried forward to next year	120,000

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1,494
Number of questionnaires returned	248

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	30	59	7	1	2
My child is making good progress in school.	36	53	4	1	6
Behaviour in the school is good.	29	51	8	4	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	52	15	6	6
The teaching is good.	27	61	4	1	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	53	12	5	8
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	46	45	5	2	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	57	40	2	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	23	46	19	3	9
The school is well led and managed.	30	55	3	2	10
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	37	53	3	2	5
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	35	43	8	2	12

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

ENGLISH

77 Pupils enter the school with standards below those expected for their age. Pupils' standards of attainment at the end of Year 9 are in line with those found nationally. In National Curriculum tests in 1999, the percentage of pupils reaching at least level 5 was below the national average, but the percentage achieving at least level 6 was close to the national average. Boys' results were closer to their own national average than those of girls were to theirs. The average points score of pupils was below the national average in 1999, but over the last four years, pupils' performance has been close to the national average. When compared with pupils in similar schools, test results in 1999 were above average. Bearing in mind the comparatively low level of literacy on entry to the school, pupils make satisfactory progress by the end of Year 9.

78 The general standard of attainment at the end of Year 11 is in line with the national expectation. In the GCSE for both English language and English literature, results in 1999 were below the national average. Boys' results were closer to their own national average than girls' were to theirs. Pupils performed better in both subjects than they did in the majority of others. Results in 2000 showed a marked improvement, and in both language and literature, results were in line with the national averages for 1999.

79 Pupils listen attentively throughout the school and work productively in pairs and small groups. The quality of speech varies greatly throughout the school, and the overall standard is below that found nationally. Pupils in Year 7 are, in the main, confident and enthusiastic in answering questions, particularly average and lower-attaining pupils. In one such class, pupils read their own nonsense poems with energy and enjoyment. As they mature, the majority of pupils become less willing to answer and, although understanding their work well, they do not answer fluently and audibly. Very few pupils at the end of Year 11, particularly high attaining ones, develop ideas articulately and pursue a coherent argument. When working in groups, however, pupils throughout the school communicate effectively. Although some drama is taught within English lessons, pupils' confidence and ability would benefit from more regular experience of drama as a separate subject.

80 Attainment in reading is in line with that found nationally. The general standard of reading throughout the school is average and enables pupils to enjoy a wide range of literary and non-literary texts. A significant number of pupils in Year 7 have a reading age well below their chronological age. Low-attaining pupils, and those with special educational needs, receive effective support in class, and the majority make good progress with their reading. Regular paired reading with older pupils plays a valuable part in improving standards. Some pupils read aloud clearly and audibly, but the reading of others lacks variety of intonation, pace and emphasis. Great care is taken to provide texts appropriate to pupils' levels of attainment. By the end of Year 9, pupils confidently identify key elements of plot, character and themes in their study of plays and novels.

81 Written work is, in general, carefully planned and neatly presented. By the end of Year 9 high attaining pupils write with imagination and enthusiasm, crafting their work skilfully and expressing ideas accurately. Pupils throughout the school write effectively for a range of purposes and readerships. At the end of Year 11, high-attaining pupils produce well-written assignments of above average quality. The best pieces are usually autobiographical or based upon their study of literature. The majority of pupils draft their work methodically, but a significant number of average or low-attaining pupils fail to correct common errors in spelling, punctuation, sentence structure and paragraphing. Word processing is used regularly to

assist in the drafting process. Much lively and interesting written work is displayed attractively in classrooms and corridors.

82 The behaviour of almost all pupils throughout both key stages is good. Most pupils are well motivated and eager to learn. Occasionally, pupils do not raise their hands before answering, but this is usually through enthusiasm rather than lack of discipline. Relationships are mutually respectful and pupils show tolerance and understanding of the views of others. They work well together in small groups and show initiative when given challenging assignments. For example, high-attaining pupils in Year 9 worked at pace and with commitment when preparing a newsletter based upon an aspect of their study of *Animal Farm*. Those pupils had also shown initiative in word-processing their scripts. Positive attitudes to learning and a good standard of behaviour are particular strengths of the department.

83 The quality of teaching throughout both key stages is never less than satisfactory. At Years 7 to 9, it is good in almost all lessons and very good in half of lessons. Teaching is good in virtually all lessons at Years 9 to 11. Teachers' knowledge and understanding are uniformly good and they plan their lessons very thoroughly. They match work carefully to pupils' interests and levels of attainment, and have high expectations of behaviour and standards. Pupils respond by behaving well and working hard. Pupils with special educational needs are taught with particular sensitivity and understanding. Standards of assessment and record keeping are high, and the quality of marking is very good, with much helpful and encouraging comment. Basic skills are constantly revised and re-enforced. Relationships are friendly and productive. In the great majority of lessons, tasks are clear, targets are set and achieved, a lively range of language activities is used, the pace is brisk, all pupils are appropriately challenged, and progress is reviewed. Pupils respond to challenge by producing work of quality.

84 The curriculum meets statutory requirements. Schemes of work are now used consistently by staff, demonstrating clear improvement since the last inspection. Departmental documentation is very thorough and informative. Drama is taught in English lessons, but pupils do not experience regular drama lessons as a separate subject. Many pupils enjoy taking part in school productions, but do not have opportunity for a structured course in drama to the end of Year 9. The below-average standard of speech, especially the lack of confidence in expressing ideas, and poor audibility and clarity of diction, would benefit from the experience of drama. At the moment, there is no suitable accommodation for drama. English teaching rooms are made attractive through good use of display materials, especially pupils' work. Two members of the department do not have a permanent teaching base, which is both inefficient and stressful. The very well-qualified staff work with great commitment and a shared purpose and vision. The subject is very well managed and is led with great skill and humanity.

85 In most subjects across the curriculum, the standard of speaking is below that found nationally. Pupils listen attentively in all subjects, but a majority lack fluency and clarity in their speech. In modern foreign languages and religious education, pupils are actively encouraged to speak clearly and audibly. Elsewhere, pupils are not given the opportunity to develop ideas through discussion or to use talk as an essential mode of learning. On occasions, it is pupils in Year 7 who are most willing to offer contributions and, by the end of Year 11, high-attaining pupils are often the most reticent and unforthcoming in speech. There is no whole-school policy on literacy. The poor standard of speech across the curriculum has an adverse effect upon the overall quality of pupils' learning.

86 In all subjects, pupils' reading comprehension is adequate to allow them to understand their textbooks and other materials. Pupils are encouraged to read aloud in history and

religious education and do so willingly. The library is used well, but is too small for a large school and lacks adequate facilities for an effective centre of resources for learning.

87 The general standard of written work across the curriculum is in line with that found nationally. In mathematics, history and music, great attention is given to accurate spelling. Written work is, in the main, carefully presented, with neat and legible handwriting. There is limited evidence of extended writing in most subjects.

MATHEMATICS

88 Pupils' attainment is below average on entry to the school. Standards are below average for pupils at fourteen and when they reach the school leaving age of sixteen. Standards are improving, however, and, as a result of good teaching and the introduction of a numeracy strategy, standards have risen significantly between 1999 and 2000. Standards observed during the inspection were higher than indicated in previous examination results. Results for the end of Year 9 tests, and this year's GCSE, indicate that standards are improving, though they are still below those expected for both fourteen and sixteen year olds.

89 Standards attained by pupils of age fourteen are below the national averages. In the 1999 Standard Assessment Tests, results were below those attained in other schools, although they were above average for pupils in similar schools. Results show that standards of attainment were below at level 5 and at the higher level 6. Standards have been below average over the four-year period since 1996, and while the national trend is upwards, the school's trend is erratic. The attainment of boys is better than that of girls. Inspection findings confirm that standards are below average, but they are higher than the 1999 results indicate. Test results improved in 2000.

90 Standards attained by pupils aged sixteen are also below the national averages. In the 1999 GCSE examination, the national average for grades A* to C was 46%. The school's result was 30%. Boys performed much better than girls, with 34% of boys gaining A* to C grades compared to 25%. Both figures are, however, below the national averages (46% for girls and 45% for boys). Few pupils ever achieved the highest (A*) grade. Lower-attaining pupils are successful in the foundation numeracy examination. The subject compares unfavourably with several other subjects in the school, but the highest number of candidates ever was entered for the examination in 1999, with 99.50% attaining grades A* to G (compared to the national average of 96%). Inspection findings confirm that standards are below average, but are higher than the 1999 figures indicate. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in both key stages.

91 Pupil attainment in mathematics in Key Stage 3 whilst still below average, has risen considerably since the time of the last inspection. For example, lower attaining pupils in Year 7 multiply 2 digit numbers by 3 digit numbers, whilst average and higher attaining pupils perform more complex multiplications accurately. Lower attaining pupils in Year 9 know how to find both the mean and the range of a set of numbers, and use calculators appropriately. However, there are still weaknesses, for example some lower attaining pupils in Year 9 are not sure about rounding to the nearest whole number or know that £14.2 is £14.20p.

92 By Key Stage 4 pupils of all abilities have made sound progress. Lower attaining pupils have sound knowledge of the basic four rules of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division, average attaining pupils find the rules of simple sequence like 2,4,8,16,36 and higher attaining pupils in Year 11 solve fairly complex equations. In spite of this, standards remain below average. Higher attaining pupils make silly errors in calculating, even though they know what to do.

93 Standards in numeracy are below those normally seen, although they have improved considerably, due to the planned programme, since the last inspection. One of the strategies used is an annual numeracy week for all pupils aged 11-13. Under the guidance of the mathematics department, pupils undertake numeracy activities in every lesson. However, lack of knowledge in basic numeracy is still a barrier to higher skills, for example many pupils are insufficiently confident with basic fractions to develop algebraic fractions.

94 The mathematics department contributes soundly to developing literacy skills through the use of key words, and this is done consistently. Pupils' speaking skills are not developed sufficiently. Insufficient use is made of information technology. Examples of the use of mathematics and the development of numeracy skills are found in science, design and technology, history, geography and religious education but opportunities are missed in some lessons. Whilst levels of numeracy have improved considerably since the last inspection, they are still below the national average.

95 Teaching is of good quality in all year groups. Most lessons seen during the inspection were at least satisfactory, and in a majority of lessons in both key stages was either good or very good. Teachers use good subject knowledge to make presentations, with a beneficial effect on pupils' appreciation of the importance of step-by-step approaches and attention to detail. Clear learning objectives are usually made explicit to pupils, and planning is generally good. The lack of timed targets is sometimes detrimental to the pace of working. Teachers' use of questioning to involve large numbers of pupils in recapping learning and to extend of ideas into new areas is generally good. The use of investigations to encourage the exploration of mathematics is under-developed, and many pupils are not able to explain their understanding or workings. Teachers have established relationships with pupils where they work as partners in learning which results in a well-developed working atmosphere in most lessons. Teachers make sound use of resources and opportunities to use interesting resources to enhance learning in numeracy skills are developing well. Marking is regular, but there are too many examples where pupils are not explicitly told what they need to do to improve their work. Too many pupils are not aware of their targets in the subject, and reports to parents are not informative about what pupils know, understand and can do in mathematics. Pupils with special educational needs benefit from smaller groups, and here teachers plan well for the needs of pupils. In one lesson, every pupil in Year 10 was given individual attention, with classwork and homework set to suit every pupil's needs. Relationships are good, and some teachers use humour well to try to involve and enliven learning.

96 Pupils' behaviour is good. Their attitudes are usually good, but they are not confident to put forward their own ideas or to ask for help if they need it. Most lessons are characterised by an atmosphere of quiet and purposeful activity. Many pupils are over-reliant on the teacher. Some girls lack interest in the subject. There are few opportunities for independent learning and pupils are slow to get along when unsure how to approach a task. Provision for the use of information technology is inconsistent.

97 The head of mathematics is committed to raising standards, and is supported well by all colleagues. There is a good balance of maintenance and development items in the departmental planning, but it is not linked to measurable success criteria for teachers in order to raise achievement. Departmental documentation gives good attention to teaching styles and to the appropriate delegation of key tasks, including monitoring arrangements. There is an appropriate assessment system and an effective record to track each pupil's progress as they move through the school. The department analyses data to quantify progress and inform curriculum planning. The quality of accommodation is satisfactory. In some classes, space is not used well. There is good use of posters and display to foster the historical and cultural

development of mathematics, and to celebrate work done during the recent, successful, summer numeracy school.

98 Since the last inspection, progress has been made in raising standards at both key stages. The poor numeracy skills that were identified are being addressed well, but there is still more to be done in this area. Pupils are generally attentive, usually co-operative, and usually concentrate well. The major strength continues to be in the quality of teaching, which is good or very good in a high proportion of lessons. Statutory requirements are met.

SCIENCE

99 Pupils' attainment is below average on entry to the school. In the 1999 end of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests, the proportion of pupils obtaining the average level 5 or higher was below average, although the proportion obtaining level 6 or higher was close to average. Results were lower than in 1997 and 1998 and compared with similar schools in 1999, results were broadly average although a higher proportion of pupils reached the higher level 6 than in similar schools. Results from 2000 show an increase in the proportion of pupils achieving the average and above-average levels. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, the proportion of pupils obtaining A*-C grades was below average continuing the pattern of recent years. However, results in 2000 showed some improvements in double award science, single award science, biology and chemistry. Results in physics have risen but are not as high as those in biology and chemistry in 2000, an issue the department has started to address through more structured practical and investigation work. Standards have risen slightly since the last inspection. Overall, they are slightly below the average for the school.

100 Evidence from the inspection shows that standards are close to average overall by the end of Key Stage 3, although there are significant numbers of pupils with learning difficulties. The highest-attaining pupils have a sound knowledge of the carbon cycle, forces and electrical circuits. They understand that sound and light travel in wave form and recognise that there is a difference between them. Most of these pupils use correct scientific terms and, when encouraged, explain their thinking accurately, although this is not true of all of these pupils. Average and lower attaining pupils struggle with some of the scientific terms they are taught and, although understanding is usually sound, they have difficulty expressing their understanding and knowledge in either speech or writing. Practical skills are good overall and pupils carry out investigations competently, measuring accurately and recording what they observe with care. Over the key stage, pupils' achievements are satisfactory. For example, work done in Year 8 on the constituents of foods is consolidated effectively in Year 9, when pupils develop a more in-depth knowledge of the function of the different constituents. However, pupils' ability to express their knowledge develops only slowly. Pupils with special educational needs make better progress overall, because teaching usually encourages them to discuss and talk about what they do and study in lessons.

101 By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is broadly average, although there is a recognisable group of higher-attaining pupils following the separate sciences, who generally perform above the average. These pupils have a good understanding of carbon chemistry and sound knowledge of the difference of carbon-carbon bonds in alkanes and alkenes. They explain the difference between substitution and addition reactions well, mainly because the teacher expects pupils to explain their thinking and provides opportunities for them to do so, although, even here, pupils sometimes stumble over their explanations. Similarly, the same pupils perform well in their work with electronics, discussing and sometimes arguing about the circuitry required to solve electronic problems. These pupils learn and achieve well. The lowest-attaining pupils generally make sound progress in developing their knowledge. On occasion, their achievement is very good and, for example, some pupils with special educational needs successfully carry out calculations to work out the atomic mass, numbers

of protons, electrons and neutrons in atoms successfully and they name the subatomic particles accurately. This is the result of the teacher's high expectations and considerable support and encouragement. Most other pupils make sound progress and, for example, develop a sound understanding and knowledge of the properties of springs through investigations they plan and carry out. However, some pupils learn more slowly and, although their knowledge is sound and often good, their understanding of, for example, the change between solid and liquid is poorly expressed because they are too accustomed to copying notes, rather than writing for themselves.

102 Teaching is generally good. At Key Stage 3, teaching was satisfactory or better in nearly all lessons, and was unsatisfactory in only one lesson. In just over half of lessons, teaching is good or better and in about one in six lessons, it is very good. The picture is similar at Key Stage 4, although there is a little more very good teaching and no unsatisfactory teaching. Teachers have good subject knowledge and this is evident in the high quality of information, explanations and notes they give pupils. Work is generally well matched to the needs of pupils. Lessons are well planned and organised, usually with clear learning objectives and a range of activities, including practical work or investigations. The quality of learning in these instances is satisfactory. On occasion, teachers spend the whole of a one-hour lesson, with pupils either listening to their explanations or copying notes, and in these situations, pupils lose concentration and learn less than expected. Generally, teachers have high expectations of pupils and provide support for individuals as they require it. Teachers maintain friendly relationships with pupils and, coupled with the high expectations and variety of activities seen in most lessons, discipline is good. Rare misbehaviour is dealt with firmly and sensitively. Pupils' work is generally marked regularly, often with constructive comments or oral feedback and this plays an important part in how well pupils learn. Teaching methods are sound overall, with significant strengths in the quality of information provided and consolidation of previous work. Homework is given regularly and is usually a constructive development of classwork.

103 In the best teaching, teachers challenge pupils by expecting them to explain the knowledge they learn, thus developing their understanding. In the same lessons, worksheets are used as a resource, which pupils have to use in order to be able to explain experimental procedures, for example, in explaining the various steps required to separate sand, salt and water. In similar lessons, teachers' questions are searching and pupils are expected to explain why alkenes and alkanes react differently, and to talk about the structure of the atom. Pupils learn well in these situations because they are involved in thinking about the ideas associated with the work they do, and they have to find out information for themselves, and this has a positive impact on their level of understanding. In many otherwise satisfactory lessons pupils are asked questions requiring one or two-word answers, are given worksheets requiring one-word completions of sentences or are expected to copy from books or other sources. There are too few opportunities for pupils to talk or write about the science they study or to work independently; pupils do not think about what they know sufficiently or learn to express their understanding fluently. For example, in a lesson on fuels, pupils could not explain what fossil fuels were, even though they had copied notes on the subject matter the lesson before. In the one lesson where teaching was unsatisfactory, pupils' learning was unsatisfactory because the teacher attempted to cover far too much material in the time available and, without sufficient opportunity for discussion, pupils became confused.

104 Pupils behave well and have good attitudes to the subject. They have considerable respect for their teachers, who help and support them with their work. Relationships between pupils are good, and particularly so when collecting apparatus, working together in groups and moving around laboratories, some of which are very small. Most pupils take pride in their work, and respond well to constructive criticism. They show a good sense of responsibility in the way they conduct themselves in practical and investigation work.

105 The subject is managed very well, with a comprehensive development plan that includes developing pupils' thinking skills. Staff work together well and have a clear focus on raising standards. Assessment information about pupils is computerised and is used effectively; it is used to provide pupil targets, and there is discussion about further development to produce targets for teaching groups and to aid lesson planning and curriculum development. However, there has not been sufficient focus on developing pupils' literacy skills through science and, although the curriculum is well planned and meets statutory requirements, generally it does not reflect either the diversity of cultures in this country, or those in the school, for example, in the study of diet. The department is supported well by two laboratory technicians. This is a reduction in support since the last inspection, and the present technicians are stretched to support the amount of practical work needed for the subject. Overall, accommodation is satisfactory; some laboratories are large and well equipped, but some others are much too small for the classes that occupy them. There has been some refurbishment of rooms, and more is planned. Teachers and technicians are conscious of safety issues in lessons, and suitable precautions are taken and advice given.

ART

106 Overall attainment at the end of Years 9 and 11 mirrors that reported in the previous inspection and there are some improvements. The attainment of the majority of pupils at age 14 is in line with national averages. Pupils in the low-ability groups attain less well, but pupils with special educational needs now achieve good results in relation to their prior attainment, and some produce characterful designs. In the middle and upper-band groups, observational drawing and control of a variety of media are satisfactory and often good. Progress across the key stage is good. At age sixteen, those who have chosen to do art are mostly achieving standards in line with national averages. In 1999 results in GCSE were above the average for all other subjects taught in the school. However, a significant number of pupils, perceived by the school as not suited to double science GCSE study, have been allocated to the art option and the attainment of many of these is below average. Some of them have been placed in the specially created GCSE computer graphics course, where most achieve success, often attaining their highest GCSE grade in this subject. The improvement in boys' GCSE art and design results, noted in the last report for those gaining grades A*-C, has continued, and in 2000, results were above national averages. Girls' results remain below the national average. Boys achieve relatively better results in GCSE computer graphics. This significant gender difference in art and computer graphics examination results was not reflected in the lessons observed. In art and design, boys and girls worked with equal understanding in the styles of other artists and there is interesting, investigative three-dimensional work. Although work produced is generally skilful, it often lacks imaginative flair, especially from the highest-attaining pupils. Year 10 pupils are at a very early stage of the computer graphics course, but by Year 11, have gained confidence in using the programmes, and many produce interesting results.

107 The generally good quality of teaching noted in the last inspection has been well maintained. At the end of Year 9, it is good, with some very good features. At the end of Year 11, it is always at least satisfactory, and in the majority of lessons, it is good. The teaching of those with special educational needs, an area for development in the last inspection, is now done very well and there is good provision for the middle and upper-ability pupils. Planning is a strength of the department. Project activities are well sequenced to develop pupils' skills and understanding of the given theme and enables pupils to learn effectively. Individual lessons are carefully structured, but in some cases, such structures, become a straitjacket. The lack of opportunity for pupils to become independent was an issue in the last inspection and the department should monitor its practice, especially at Key Stage 4, to ensure that imagination is not stifled. Tasks selected for pupils are usually challenging technically and appropriate for their ability level, and teaching methods are generally effective in enabling pupils to

accomplish them. Pupils' speaking skills are limited and staff should offer pupils more opportunity to discuss their own work and that of their peers and other artists, to develop confidence and understanding in using technical language. Pupils are managed very well and high standards of behaviour are secured easily in most lessons. There is good verbal feedback to pupils as they work, assessments are well recorded and judgements are sound. The moderation of pupils' work recommended in the previous report is now done and this contributes to the quality of assessments. Suitable homework is set with varying frequency depending on project needs.

108 Pupils' attitudes to their lessons are good and often very good. In all lessons seen, pupils listened carefully, watched demonstrations attentively and were able to sustain their concentration over long periods of time. They co-operate with each other well in paired activities. Behaviour is almost always very good indeed. Motivation is strong at all ability levels. Good teaching results in effective learning.

109 Moral and social education is well catered for. Spiritual and multicultural education is underdeveloped. There is a need to give more emphasis to aesthetic qualities and to devote more attention to the excitement of non-western art.

110 The department is well led and statutory requirements are met. Departmental documentation is very clear and supportive. All those teaching art are specialists, with long experience in the school. The previous report implied the need for more departmental discussion and review. At this stage of the new school year, there is still work to be done to develop approaches to the revised National Curriculum and all members of the department should be involved in this process.

111 The art rooms were not originally designed as specialist studios, but space and lighting are generally satisfactory. Storage facilities are poor and the desks are not ideally suitable. The department is relatively under-funded and, although consumable resources for two-dimensional work are satisfactory, opportunities for three-dimensional work suffer from the limitations of the very old kiln.

112 Overall, this is a very successful department offering a good quality art education to its pupils. Most of the key issues in the earlier report have been dealt with fully. The next stage in the department's quest for quality is to address those remaining issues, indicated below, and those arising from this inspection. They are:

- to increase the level of pupil independence, especially at Key Stage 4;
- to increase the level of work from other cultures;
- to give more emphasis to spiritual/aesthetic aspects to develop imaginative responses;
- to develop pupils' speaking skills;
- to involve all art staff in developing approaches to the new National Curriculum;
- to increase funding for 3-D work.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

113 By the end of Year 9, pupils' attainment is in line with that expected nationally. Most pupils attain the expected level 5 of the National Curriculum, with some going on to level 6. Pupils in Key Stage 4 are able to follow a number of GCSE courses within the department; most opt for 'resistant materials' and 'food technology'. Results in those examinations are improving, but are below average nationally and lower than those achieved in other subjects in the school. This is partly explained by the ability of the group of pupils taking these courses: many of the higher attaining pupils opt for the 'system' course or for textiles, where results are

much higher. However, results would be higher if pupils were able to demonstrate better skills in the design and evaluation elements of their work.

114 By the end of Year 9, all pupils achieve better results in making than in designing or evaluating. The work they do forms a good foundation for their use of different materials in the following years and also has a strong emphasis on technological elements such as electronics, mechanisms and structures. Meeting these aspects of the subject early in the school contributes well to pupils' success in the systems course in Years 10 to 11. Throughout the early years, pupils develop good safety habits and learn to use tools competently. The course they follow is made up of a series of relatively short experiences in different aspects of the subject. This is successful in the range of experience it provides, but by being so intensive, it provides little time to develop design ideas or carry out thoughtful evaluations.

115 In Key Stage 4, the things pupils make are often good. They select their materials carefully and know how to handle them correctly. In resistant materials, they use wood, metal and plastics appropriately in their design, taking account of their strength and other properties, as well as their appearance. In their work on food, for example, pupils select ingredients to develop recipes based on their previous experience of flavour combinations and also take account of nutritional requirements and special diets. They use tools correctly and accurately, knowing which to choose for different tasks. When they are working, they are aware of the need to organise themselves properly, they take hygiene seriously and are aware of the safety requirements, particularly when using power tools. Overall, the standards they achieve in making are sound and often they are good. Their design folders tend to be weaker and often depress their final score, particularly for average / lower attaining pupils. The folders often do not show enough emphasis on the analysis on the problem, so that there is not enough detail on which to base a thorough evaluation at the end. Pupils' attainment is highest in the systems course, where they develop a good understanding of electronic circuits, which they adapt successfully for projects such as security alarms and reaction timers. In this work, they make good use of computer programmes to test their circuit designs and develop the layout of components.

116 The department has improved significantly since the last inspection. Results at GCSE are still below the national average, but most pupils are making appropriate progress in line with their prior attainment; teaching is sound and the subject is managed well with boys and girls achieving similar standards.

117 Teaching in design and technology is sound. All staff have good subject knowledge and often convey a genuine enthusiasm for the work they are doing. Pupils benefit from skilful demonstrations of techniques in all aspects of the subject and are taught how to use tools safely and effectively. Teachers organise practical activities well and are all particularly effective when providing support for individuals, for example in helping a young pupil who had previously used centimetres to mark out her work in millimetres. As a result of this type of individual attention, pupils with special educational needs make good progress in the practical elements of the subject. In some lessons, teachers gave an over-long introduction during which pupils listened passively. This was less successful in developing pupils' ability to think about the subject and raise questions of their own than those lessons where teachers involved the pupils more actively by asking them to give suggestions and reasons of their own. Similarly, some teachers develop pupils' independence successfully, expecting them to make choices for themselves and justify their decisions; in other lessons, pupils receive too much guidance and rely on the teacher to do too much for them.

118 Pupils have positive attitudes to the subject. They work hard, particularly at the practical parts of the subject. Many respond well when they are given the opportunity to use

their own initiative, but others are inclined to remain passive, doing what is asked of them, answering questions briefly and only when asked directly.

119 The subject is managed well. The two heads of the federated department have raised staff morale and moved forward determinedly since the last inspection. They have largely overcome the disadvantages of working at separate parts of the school and have developed a unified approach to the subject. The curriculum is supported effectively by schemes of work that specify the broad aims of each section of the course and these ensure that the full range of the subject is covered. Further development of learning objectives for lessons within a section would help to clarify teachers' aims for each lesson, ensuring pupils had the same experience, and identifying where time could be devoted to developing design and evaluation skills.

GEOGRAPHY

120 In 1999, teachers assessed pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 as below the level expected nationally. Attainment has been close to the national expectation for 14-year-old pupils, but has declined in the two most recent years from the levels recorded in 1998. Results in the GCSE examinations in 1999 were broadly in line with the national average and with the average of the grades pupils gained in their other subjects in the school. Results from the most recent examinations are below those achieved in 1999, especially in the percentage of pupils achieving at least grade G. The attainments of boys and girls, throughout school, are similar.

121 In the work seen during the inspection, pupils' attainment was in line with levels expected nationally for their ages at the end of Years 9 and 11, and above what might have been expected from their earlier attainment. Pupils of all ages and levels of attainment make good progress, including those with special educational needs, some of whom are pupils from the neighbouring special school. The emphasis teachers place on encouraging pupils to provide more detail and explanation in their written and oral work, at both key stages, is producing benefits in the higher standards now seen in pupils' work at Years 7 to 9.

122 Throughout the school, pupils of all levels of attainment present information on maps and graphs neatly and accurately, and most can use graphs to find information. Pupils of higher and average levels of attainment in Year 9 used information from graphs well to describe the climatic conditions found near the equator and compare them with those found in Sunderland. Pupils with special educational needs in Year 8 also used information from climate graphs effectively in work on Nigeria. The great majority of pupils in Year 11 collected and recorded information successfully on land use in Sunderland through fieldwork, and most used graphs appropriately to present their findings, many using information technology effectively. However, many average and lower-attaining pupils are weak at the skills of analysing information and presenting reasoned conclusions.

123 In Years 7 to 9, the great majority of pupils recognise and describe geographical patterns and processes, and many explain them competently. Pupils in Year 7 identify the types of land use characteristic of different areas of a city. Year 8 pupils know how the population of a country such as Ghana is affected by changes in birth and death rates, and many can explain some of these changes. Some pupils with special educational needs in Year 9 can describe atmospheric processes such as evaporation and condensation and their significance in creating rain. By Year 9, many can explain how human actions can have unintended consequences in work on Bangladesh or coastal erosion in Holderness. In Years 9 to 11, pupils produce good work on the causes and effects of population growth and on the formation of landforms in limestone areas.

124 Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. In Year 9 classes, the great majority, including those with special educational needs, were interested and keen to participate. This contributed to the good progress made in the lessons. However, in a few lessons, many pupils were reluctant to offer or develop answers in oral work. Most pupils settle readily to tasks and work conscientiously and productively. Year 11 pupils behaved responsibly when not directly supervised while collecting fieldwork data. Pupils' relationships with teachers and with each other are good. They worked well together in pairs and groups in a number of lessons at both key stages, and enhanced their learning by sharing and comparing ideas.

125 There has been improvement since the last inspection. Pupils' attainment throughout the school, and in GCSE examinations, remains broadly in line with the national average, and most make good progress. There is no longer any unsatisfactory teaching and learning, and the good standards of management and leadership have been maintained. Work is now well matched to the needs of pupils with differing levels of attainment, but there has been only limited progress in developing curricular links with primary schools. The department has developed effective procedures for identifying and dealing with weaknesses and its capacity to secure further improvement is good.

126 The quality of teaching is good at both key stages, and pupils learn well as a result. The teaching is good, sometimes very good, in a substantial minority of lessons and is never less than satisfactory. Teachers have a good command both of the subject and of assessment requirements, particularly for GCSE, and this is shown in their planning, their marking and in the demands they make of pupils. In Year 11, for example, many pupils make good progress in their coursework because they practise the necessary skills before beginning their individual investigation and receive well-informed advice on how to improve. Written comments at the end of work, particularly at Key Stage 4, give helpful guidance to pupils and help them to improve their work.

127 Very good management of pupils, and high quality relationships between pupils and teachers are characteristic of geography lessons. Teachers maintain discipline firmly, but unobtrusively, in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Consequently, they are able to make effective use of a wide range of teaching methods, including games, decision-making activities, enquiry work, and information technology, to stimulate pupils' interest in the subject. In some lessons, teaching was particularly effective because of the teacher's energy and evident enthusiasm. Work proceeded at a challenging pace, with short deadlines for activities and demanding questioning, as in a Year 9 lesson on tropical rain forests. Pupils responded well to a series of stimulating activities and made very good progress in their understanding of the forest environment.

128 The geography department is well led, and teachers share a commitment to improving standards, which is reflected in the strong work ethos evident in lessons and the good use made of information from assessment and monitoring of teaching to plan future developments.

HISTORY

129 By the end of Year 9, pupils' attainment overall is in line with that expected nationally, a similar standard to that reported at the time of the last inspection. Teachers assessed their pupils overall as above the national average in 1998 and 1999, but in 2000, the proportion assessed as reaching average standards or above was lower than that of 1999. The standard of work seen during the inspection was in line with that expected nationally. There is little significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls. The majority of pupils, including those with special educational needs, reach standards that are appropriate for their

ability. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 explain and link historical causes and effects. They use a range of sources competently to extend their knowledge and understanding about the past. The highest attaining pupils successfully evaluate the reliability of different types of sources and produce very good quality extended writing.

130 Pupils taking the GCSE course in Years 9 to 11 reach an overall standard that is close to the national average. At the time of the last inspection, the most recent GCSE results reported were above the national average. The percentage of both boys and girls achieving grades A*-C in 1998 and 1999 was below the national average. In 2000, the percentage achieving A*-C was higher than it was in 1998 and 1999, although still below the 1999 national average. Attainment at A*-C has fluctuated over the last five years, but overall it has improved slightly since 1996. It was above that of other subjects in 1998. The proportion of pupils gaining A or A* grades is below the national average.

131 The overall standard of work seen in Years 9 to 11 during the inspection was in line with that expected nationally. Pupils use a range of sources, including statistics, effectively, to build up a view of the past and to explain change and continuity. Pupils in Year 10 used photographs of archaeological evidence successfully to make deductions about aspects of Egyptian life in their study of medicine through time. In a Year 11 class, pupils identified what information could be obtained from census returns.

132 The quality of teaching seen was never less than good and is sometimes very good. This standard is similar to that seen at the last inspection. Teachers know their subject well at both key stages, and communicate their knowledge and love of history with considerable enthusiasm. As a result, pupils acquire good knowledge and understanding about the past. Work set in lessons is appropriately demanding. In a Year 9 lesson on 19th century farming, for example, pupils were asked to use a map, drawings and statistics to identify changes and their impact on different groups of people. An exercise, which involved putting pictures in the correct order to re-tell the legend of Romulus and Remus, successfully reinforced the knowledge and understanding about the story for a group of lower attaining pupils in Year 7.

133 Teachers use a good range of resources, including slides, videos and artefacts, effectively. An appropriate variety of teaching methods, including whole class, individual and paired work, ensures that pupils have opportunities to learn in a range of different ways. Some lessons, at both key stages, however, are too heavily dominated by the teacher, and the pupils have little opportunity to work independently. This restricts the higher-attaining pupils' capacity to form and develop their own views and opinions. Teachers organise and manage their pupils very well. Relationships are very good; there is clear, mutual respect between teachers and their pupils, who respond by working hard, in lessons that usually proceed at a brisk pace.

134 Pupils of all ability levels bring enthusiasm and commitment to their work at both key stages. The majority enjoy the subject. As a result, they make good progress in acquiring new knowledge and understanding. Most pupils want to learn, know more, and to improve the standard of their work. They are prepared to work hard in order to do so. Good, collaborative work was seen by Year 11 pupils studying the development of a local street as part of the GCSE course on a site visit, which was well organised and managed by the teacher.

135 Statutory requirements are met at Years 7 to 9. The leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of department is aware of areas where the department can improve still further, and is identifying strategies for improvement. There is a clear commitment to raising attainment in public examinations, whilst maintaining access to the subject for the full ability range. The experienced, dedicated and enthusiastic teachers are an asset to the department. Although the provision of resources is good overall, the department does not have sufficient textbooks to allow whole classes to take books home.

There is, however, a very good range of other books available in classrooms. Some use is made of information technology for research, and the department has set up its own website on the Internet. Insufficient use is made of off-site resources at Years 7 to 9.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

136 Pupils' attainment, judged by the teacher assessments at the end of Year 9, was close to the national average, with more girls than boys reaching the expected level 5 or above. The 2000 GCSE results were above the national average for pupils achieving A*-C, but in line with the national average for the A*-G grades when compared with the 1999 national results nationally. These results are a significant improvement on previous years and above the average for the school. The results for GCSE information systems examination were that 73% of the pupils achieved an A*-C grade and 99% achieved A*-G. Although there were fewer girls than boys entered for the 2000 GCSE examination, overall girls achieved higher grades.

137 Attainment at the end of Year 9 is in line with national expectations. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with varied previous experience, but by the time they reach Year 9, they are confident users in a range of applications. Pupils' word-processing skills are well established. They are familiar with the keyboard, use the short cut functions with understanding to change the size and the style of the lettering and use the 'cut and paste' facility to edit their work. Pupils use an art program to design 'logos' for a sports shirt as part of a design and technology topic. Pupils have knowledge of the 'mail merge' facility. They use this technique to produce correspondence to customers on letters with their own individual headed notepaper, using images from the art gallery that have been resized to fit their publication. Pupils are beginning to gain an understanding of a spreadsheet. Pupils in Year 8 develop their skills by using the spreadsheet to make a publication of their timetable. This knowledge is developed further during a pocket money topic, displaying their income and using the correct formulae to calculate their expenditure and displaying their findings in graph form. Pupils' knowledge of the control element of the National Curriculum is around the national expectation. Using simple program language, they create shapes and manipulate an 'on screen' object to move in different directions. Pupils of all abilities make satisfactory progress.

138 The attainment at the end of Year 11 is in line with national average standards. Pupils benefit from regular lessons in information technology and use their skills in other areas of the curriculum. Using the facilities of a desktop publishing program, pupils present the findings of their personal research topics, such as local environmental issues and notable features of Sunderland, in attractively designed publications, enhanced with art images. Pupils studying for GCSE information technology have an understanding of a database. This understanding is used in topics related to 'real life' situations. For example, pupils examine the ways a database can be used to speed the process of changing books in the school library and the benefits of being able to access and filter information from a list of customers at a leisure centre. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. They are often linked with more confident pupils and achieve realistic targets set. Standards of attainment have been maintained since the previous inspection.

139 The overall quality of teaching at both key stages is good. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding and use this well to demonstrate skills to pupils, resulting in good progress and learning. Teachers have good discipline, insisting on attentive listening when explaining a procedure; this leads to a good level of learning. Lessons are generally well planned to meet the needs of the individual pupils and pupils are given clear guidance on literacy skills. However, there are occasions, particularly in Year 7, where the knowledge of pupils is limited, when the work for higher-attaining pupils lacks challenge, often repeating

skills and tasks that pupils have previously experienced. Learning is improved when teachers conduct a plenary session at the end of the lesson. The pace of lessons is better where teachers have use of a video data projector, enabling them to demonstrate skills and procedures to a whole class. Teachers use skilful questioning during lessons, but the response from pupils is often slow, with a reluctance to volunteer answers unless directly asked, resulting in teachers spending some time during lessons explaining techniques. Where teaching is less effective, the aim of the lesson is not clearly explained to pupils, the organisation muddled, and there is a lack of careful questioning of pupils' understanding. The outcome of this is that pupils are confused, leading to slower learning. Some of the lessons for Years 7 and 8 are very long. Although teachers plan the lessons with a variety of activities, to maintain interest, pupils become very restless towards the end of the lesson and lose concentration, slowing the pace of the lesson and the rate of learning. This was an issue in the previous report and changes have not been implemented. Most teachers mark pupils' work on a regular basis with suggestions on how to improve their work.

140 The subject is very well managed by the head of department, who has a clear vision of the value of information technology as a tool to support pupils' learning. All statutory requirements are met. The subject is well placed for future developments and to raise standards and there are plans to upgrade hard and software and to introduce a network system to enable all pupils to access the Internet. Although teachers encourage pupils to use the appropriate language when using information technology, the lack of key words on display to support the development of literacy, results in inaccurate spellings in pupils' work.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

141 Pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 is broadly in line with national expectations. French is the only foreign language currently taught in the school; there is no German this academic year. The GCSE results in French in 2000, at A*-C and at A*-G, were broadly in line with the national average for 1999. The A*-C results have greatly improved from 28% in 1999 to 44% in 2000. Performance in GCSE in 1999 was slightly below the school's average. Since the last inspection, attainment at GCSE A*-C has improved significantly and the good standards described in the last report have been maintained. Girls achieve more highly than boys in line with national figures.

142 In the lessons seen, standards of work throughout the school ranged from below to above average and pupils achieve in line with their prior attainment. Generally, standards in listening are above average because of the teacher's good use of French throughout the lessons; speaking is good at both key stages and many pupils are confident when speaking French. Although teachers are good role models and insist on accurate pronunciation in controlled repetition, accent and intonation could be improved further. Skills of reading and writing are sound. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well, not only because they are taught in smaller sets and can benefit from more individual attention, but also because of the effective match of the language activities to the needs of the pupils.

143 The quality of teaching seen in Years 7 to 9 was always at least sound and mostly good. In Years 10 to 11, it is good. Teachers have a secure knowledge of French and speak it well throughout the lessons. The planning of activities, which practise vocabulary and structures intensively, is thorough. Teachers provide challenging questions, but also support pupils well until understanding is achieved. In some wide ability sets, there needs to be a better match of work to some pupils' needs, by modifying some of the tasks. The pupils are trained well to speak in extended sentences rather than giving single word answers. Teachers are well organised, use appropriate resources, and lessons move at a brisk pace.

Teachers really appreciate the efforts that pupils make in class, and homework is a good extension of classwork.

144 Pupils' learning is satisfactory overall and often good in Years 7 to 9, and mainly good at Key Stage 4. Pupils make great efforts to understand and persist, even when they find the learning difficult. Pupils of all abilities are given many opportunities to practise French in controlled situations. Pupils use computers well for language practice. However, there need to be more opportunities for independent learning, for extended writing and for pupils' spontaneous use of the language, although occasionally, pupils ask in French for classroom materials. Lower attaining pupils also make good progress, especially in listening and speaking. Pupils from the nearby special school make good progress by focussing well on the task and sustaining concentration.

145 Pupils' attitudes and values are very good throughout the school. Pupils behave well in lessons and have positive attitudes to French. Relationships amongst pupils and staff are courteous and friendly. Pupils listen well to each other and to teachers. Some pupils enjoyed taking on the role of the teacher during the speaking section of the lesson and acquitted themselves well. Also, some good training for pair work and for asking questions was observed, but generally there were few examples of pupils taking the initiative in French.

146 The department is well led, and teachers work hard as a team, sharing ideas and resources. They teach in a similar style and are very committed to improving standards of learning and teaching. All issues raised in the last report have been addressed, standards have risen and statutory requirements are met.

MUSIC

147 Teachers have assessed only a minority of pupils as reaching the standard expected nationally by the end of Year 9. Lessons observed and other inspection evidence indicates that a majority of pupils reach this level. No pupils are identified as showing exceptional performance. There is no significant difference overall between the attainment of girls and that of boys. The only information about incoming pupils given by primary schools relates to those who have taken instrumental lessons or who have taken part in extra-curricular groups.

148 Both in class, and through previous work, pupils show their developing ability of making music and responding to it intelligently. Pupils in Year 7, including those in lower ability sets, correctly identify instruments and phrases from recorded extracts. They are very keen to show that they remember and understand concepts such as dynamics, duration and tempo. Pupils in high-attainment groups sing three-part rounds and use contrasting dynamics. Pupils go on in the following years to invent raps, and to use the recording facility of keyboards confidently. They explore, and use imaginatively, a wide range of sampled sounds and develop an awareness of different styles, contexts and purposes of music. For example, Year 8 pupils classify different kinds of films and their music, before composing some of their own.

149 At the end of Key Stage 4, standards of attainment in music at Years 10 to 11 are in line with national averages. The percentage of pupils gaining GCSE at levels A-C in recent years matches that of all maintained schools and there have been some A* passes. Results in music are at least as good as those in pupils' other subjects. The number of pupils choosing music usually reaches double figures and includes girls and boys whose attainment is roughly equal. In lessons, the five boys and five girls in Year 10 can rehearse and perform five-part ensemble pieces without teacher direction and in limited time, go on to adapt the instrumentation and appraise the results. The fifteen in Year 11 include a few with lower levels of attainment, but all, except a non-attender, are achieving soundly. Pupils are reluctant

to discuss their learning publicly, but they use their individual strengths in music to approach in different ways the identification of features of music heard, including notating tunes from dictation. They compose, with given chord sequences, using keyboards. Some are able to use computers for music. Written work from previous years, heard and seen, shows a high standard of composition from a variety of stimuli, some self-chosen, for example a heartfelt song about bereavement by a girl who lost her brother.

150 Teaching of music at Years 7 to 9 is good overall at both key stages: it is always at least satisfactory, frequently good and sometimes very good. Strengths include knowledge and skill as musicians and good understanding of how best to encourage pupils of different ages and abilities to learn through music. Materials are prepared, which interest and challenge most pupils, and are adapted for those with learning problems. Lessons are paced well and pupils are managed so as to support good behaviour, but to allow their enjoyment to show. Teachers praise pupils of all abilities for any achievement, both in class and through careful marking of homework and pupils respond by working hard and making progress. At the end of lessons, pupils are reminded of key points, progress is underlined and the next steps anticipated. Approaches are usually through sound, live, recorded or sampled. Teaching should be improved further in order to raise standards by: redressing the balance between the use of electronic and acoustic sound; by concentrating on weaker aspects of singing - pitching, tone, breathing and starting and stopping together; by increasing the amount of discussion and opportunities for extended writing; and by raising teachers' expectations of pupils' personal reactions to music, thereby supporting their spiritual development.

151 The teaching of GCSE pupils shares many of the strengths above. In addition, teachers have good subject knowledge. They celebrate individual differences and encourage pupils' efforts at work that is new to them. Pupils respond by engaging with the work. Teachers work in a realistic way, setting achievable tasks which pupils achieve. Instrumental teachers fulfil their responsibility well for preparing pupils according to the examination requirements for performance. While some materials prepared serve their purpose very well indeed, for instance for ensemble performance, in listening exercises, larger print should be used for music scores. The use of computers by all pupils for sequencing and notation must be increased as a matter of urgency. At both key stages, teachers need to refine their use of replay equipment so as to present recorded music new to pupils as sensitively and clearly as possible. Teachers would benefit from watching each other teach. Teachers often give pupils good information about how well they are doing in comments at the end of written work.

152 Behaviour of pupils in music lessons is normally very good, frequently with full attention and purposeful work from all pupils throughout. The exceptions are some pupils in middle and lower-attaining groups in Year 9 and some younger and small groups of pupils with special educational needs. In both cases, poor concentration is the basic cause.

153 Music is well managed at Thornhill. In school, assessment of pupils' progress is regular and clear, with specific ways of helping pupils with special educational needs noted. The head of department is keenly aware of developments in the subject, seeking appropriate courses and supporting staff well. Staff give much extra time to fostering extra-curricular groups in most lunch hours, including welcoming pupils wishing to use keyboards and guitars on their own. Beyond school, instrumental and choral groups regularly perform by invitation in a variety of venues in the community, as well as in school, providing valuable experience for pupils' musical and personal development. During the inspection, a former pupil was featured on BBC1 as an example of a successful entrant to the professional theatre as singer and dancer. Regular liaison with the feeder primary schools' music co-ordinators has started. This is one of the priorities in the development plan, aiming to maximise continuity between key stages to improve standards of attainment. Greater action should be taken to increase both the resources for music in the library and the number of pupils taking instrumental tuition.

154 Some criticisms of music made at the last inspection no longer apply. There is now no unsatisfactory teaching and pupils are more frequently involved with practical work. Provision of keyboards is now sufficient in most classes. Standards at Years 7 to 9 are improving. Pupils with special educational needs are still taught, to a large extent, in discrete groups, criticised in the last report, but this does not restrict their achievement. However, accommodation remains unsuitable, still lacking smaller spaces for group work and the necessary sound insulation. The provision of headphones for keyboards allows some independent and group practical work, but restricts this to electronic sounds. Take up of instrumental provision, provided free only for pupils entitled to free school meals and GCSE candidates, is currently 3% of the school's population, an increase from an earlier low point, but below the national average. While the curriculum is better balanced, there is a bias towards European music in both schemes and resources. The planned purchase of steel pans and in-service training will start to address this.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

155 By the end of Year 9, standards are average overall, but above the national expectation in dance. Pupils in Year 9 used a video as a stimulus to create a group dance and choreograph their own motif, with good understanding of the use of space and levels. The standard was good, but better standards would be achieved in bare feet, as pupils would be able to make more sensitive movements. Pupils enter the school with a low level of skill and experience in gymnastics and, as a result, standards are below those expected. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 do not link movements together with flow, and most cannot balance with stillness or perform controlled rolling, forwards or backwards. They do not change direction when working on apparatus and their awareness of space is below average.

156 The standards achieved by pupils in the GCSE examination in 1999 were below the national average and the average for the school. There is no difference in the attainment of boys and that of girls. In the lessons seen at GCSE, and in the scrutiny of pupils' work, the standards achieved are average. In all lessons seen, standards vary between activities, but overall they are average. By the end of Year 11, standards in football are also above average. Pupils demonstrate good ball control when dribbling in a game, and are accurate in their passing - most can perform the lofted pass. Pupils demonstrated a range of previously learned, heading skills. Standards in swimming are good throughout the school and are noticeable in the successful swimming club.

157 In Years 7 to 9, the teaching is good overall: half of the teaching is good or very good. In Years 10 to 11, teaching is good overall, always at least good, and often very good. This maintains the high standard observed in the previous inspection. The quality of teaching seen in lessons is at least satisfactory. In the best lessons seen, planning is good and lesson objectives are clear. In Year 11, the teacher gave pupils the opportunity to practise a range of skills, leading to the transfer of the skill of the lofted pass into a games situation.

158 All teachers possess good subject knowledge and make good use of resources. The use of computer software by teachers in GCSE theory lessons helped to improve pupils' learning. Records of lessons were available for pupils, to help them with revision exercises on the structure of joints and bones in the body. Pupils in Year 11 learn that it is important to raise their pulse rate in order to improve their performance in swimming. Teachers are enthusiastic in their teaching and form very good relationships with their pupils. This is a strength in the department. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in lessons, especially when there are open-ended tasks for them to undertake, such as in gymnastics and dance. Lesson planning does not always take account of the full ability range of pupils.

159 Pupils' attitudes to the subject are good, being very good in Years 10 to 11. Pupils in Year 10 demonstrate a mature attitude to their work at GCSE. They adopt a high level of concentration and are prepared to enter into discussion. Girls are less active in discussion. In practical work, pupils are enthusiastic, listen intently to instructions and are keen to work hard. Good class management of pupils by teachers makes a positive contribution to this, and pupils are kept on task in most lessons. Behaviour is at least good, and sometimes excellent. There is very little non-participation in lessons.

160 There is good leadership and management, and schemes of work are in place. The quality of teaching is monitored systematically by the head of department to raise teaching standards. Procedures are in place to raise pupils' attainment at GCSE. Curriculum planning should take account of the new National Curriculum orders to match with schemes of work. At present, there is insufficient time devoted to dance and gymnastics in Years 7 to 9, and boys are not offered dance at Year 9. In Years 10 to 11, the pupils who opt for the GCSE course follow the syllabus, but do not take part in the core curriculum. As a result, they are denied their entitlement to the National Curriculum. These issues of lack of access and opportunity to the curriculum should be addressed. Assessment procedures are in place, but criteria for attainment are not clear. Reports to parents do not indicate what pupils know, understand or can do in their activities.

161 There is a range of extra-curricular activities on offer to pupils. The standards observed are good in netball, dance and swimming, where the swimming instructor makes a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. The school is involved in a range of inter-school competitive games; success is evident in football, athletics and swimming. A number of pupils have represented their sport at regional level. The school swimming team are, at present, the Tyneside Senior Schools Champions.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

162 By the end of Year 9, the attainment of pupils is average in relation to the Sunderland Agreed Syllabus. Pupils acquire a basic knowledge of some of the beliefs and practices of Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism, as well as an understanding of the nature of belief and religion. They also learn about important people, pilgrimages, festivals, symbols and books in these religions. There is no significant difference in attainment between boys and girls at the end of both key stages. The attainment of pupils with special educational needs is also in line with expectations, and pupils of all abilities attain appropriately.

163 The results in the 1999 GCSE examination for grades A* - C were just below the national average, and in 2000, they were similar. In grades A* - G, the 1999 results were slightly higher than the national average and the most recent results showed an improvement. From 1998, the number of pupils entered for the examination has risen from 43 to 76. The number of girls taking the examination has doubled in that period, whereas the number of boys has risen by a third. The gap in attainment between boys and girls has narrowed significantly over the last three years, to the point where there is no significant difference between them. However, with a time allocation that is inadequate for the challenges of a GCSE syllabus, the attainment of pupils is creditable and reflects their sustained efforts and the skill and enthusiasm of their teachers. There is no significant difference in attainment between boys and girls at the end of either key stage.

164 By the end of Year 11, the attainment of pupils following the non-GCSE course is in line with standards seen nationally. These pupils have a sound understanding of a range of contemporary, moral and religious issues such as abortion, euthanasia, marriage, crime and punishment, and environmental conservation and pollution. Up to the present, the department

has awarded pupils who successfully completed their studies a school certificate for inclusion in their record of achievement and is currently introducing the new certificate of achievement from an examination board.

165 The teaching is consistently good, and in two lessons it was very good in both key stages. All teachers have formal, specialist qualifications and are very experienced and enthusiastic. Lessons are planned well to ensure that time is used effectively to advance pupils' knowledge and understanding. Pupils are expected to behave well and work hard. Clear objectives, expositions and instructions, together with the use of stimulating resources and questions, are effective in rousing pupils' interest and challenging their thinking, as seen in a Year 10 lesson on death, where video material, sensitive questioning and discussion, and the use of pupils' own experiences helped them to explore such concepts as guilt, loss and reincarnation. A variety of interestingly presented tasks also roused interest and facilitated learning. The management of pupils is good and teachers create an orderly learning environment. Homework is viewed as a purposeful activity and is used to deepen pupils' understanding. A variety of data and individual education plans are used in the planning of lessons, and teachers follow the school policy on target setting as one of their strategies to raise attainment. Teachers have a good rapport with pupils, create a positive learning ethos, and try to raise pupils' self-esteem. Pupils are given opportunities to use information technology for research.

166 Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. They usually listen attentively to teachers and to each other. They sustain concentration well and co-operate sensibly in group work. Differing viewpoints, beliefs and practices are usually respected, as seen in a Year 11 class discussing prejudice, discrimination and the stereotyping of persons. There were no serious behaviour problems. A few cases of silly behaviour were quickly dealt with in a non-confrontational manner. The majority of pupils talk willingly about their work and treat visitors courteously. Displays of pupils' work, learning resources and classroom furniture were treated with respect. Though pupils' attitudes to work vary, many are keen to do well. Most pupils are making satisfactory progress and, on several occasions, good progress in both key stages. Learning takes place in an atmosphere conducive to work and concentration.

167 The department has responded positively to the last inspection report. Standards overall have risen in religious studies, and opportunities for higher attaining pupils to be entered for a GCSE qualification in religious studies were offered from 1996. Pupils' tasks are now better matched to their needs and teachers have consistently high expectations of all pupils in both key stages.

168 The head of department gives very good academic and professional leadership. Staff work as a team, are committed to the subject and to raising standards, by sharing ideas and good practice, by being mutually supportive, and by engaging in professional development. Teaching is formally monitored by the head of department. Religious education makes a very effective contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. A programme of visits to minority ethnic centres such as a mandir, mosque and synagogue, and meeting people from various faiths would enhance pupils' knowledge of religions and cultures. The department makes sound use of CD ROMs for pupils to develop research skills.