

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **LORETO GRAMMAR SCHOOL**

Altrincham, Cheshire

LEA area: Trafford

Unique reference number: 106378

Headteacher: Sister Patricia Goodstadt IBVM

Reporting inspector: Ms Marjorie Glynne-Jones  
2918

Dates of inspection: September 11 - 15, 2000

Inspection number: 223896

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Girls
School address:	Dunham Road Altrincham Cheshire
Postcode:	WA14 4AH
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Miss K. Foley
Date of previous inspection:	No previous inspection

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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Cynthia Millband 5241	Team inspector	Science	
Peter Harle 11672	Team inspector	Art	Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
Peter Slape 23891	Team inspector	Design and technology	
George Rayner 10817	Team inspector	Geography	Sixth Form
Ray Cardinal 22695	Team inspector	History Special educational needs Equal opportunities	
Renee Robinson 10941	Team inspector	Information communications technology (ICT)	
John Marshall 31332	Team inspector	Modern languages	
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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Loreto is the only Catholic girls' grammar school in Trafford and is oversubscribed. There are 808 pupils on roll, an average size for secondary schools, including 185 in the sixth form. The school is experiencing a period of very substantial change through two successive changes of status since 1997. It moved from being an independent school, first to grant-maintained status and subsequently to voluntary aided status in the Trafford Education Authority. Pupils travel to the school from a very wide area. They come from a wide range of backgrounds, where generally circumstances are favourable. Very few pupils are from ethnic minority families. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is well below the national average. The very small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language are all fluent English speakers. The proportion entitled to free school meals is below average. Although the school is a selective school with a strong academic tradition, the range of pupil attainment on entry is wider than is usual for grammar schools, the school offering places to pupils in the top 45 per cent of the range. This reflects a fundamental tenet of the mission of the Loreto Institute which is to offer educational opportunity to pupils whose abilities have yet to emerge with confidence.

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

This is a good school with a number of outstanding features. Pupils achieve well, particularly well in the sixth form, which reflects the generally good teaching and the very good teaching in the sixth form. The leadership and management by staff and governors are very effective, to which the headteacher's contribution is exceptional. Taking into account the above average profile of attainment on entry and the above average expenditure per pupil, the school effectively provides value for money.

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

- Christian values and ethos are a powerful thread of day-to-day school life
- The headteacher and the governing body are bringing about very substantial change with vision, thoroughness and a sharp sense of strategy
- Pupils' behaviour and relationships are excellent and they approach their work sensibly and responsibly
- Standards are generally high
- Sixth form provision is very good
- Parents hold the school in exceptionally high regard

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

- Standards in French and Spanish at A-level show a decline from the high standards at GCSE
- Statutory requirements are not met fully for the curriculum in design and technology and ICT, for staff appraisal and the headteacher's performance review, and for information published for parents
- Whole-school systems for monitoring pupils' progress are not in place, although being developed
- The quality of teaching is not monitored, although this is a development target
- Accommodation restricts learning activities in English, design and technology and modern languages, and limits department development.

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

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has not previously been inspected under Section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996.

### STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14, 16 and 18 year olds based on average points scores in National Curriculum tests and GCSE and A-level examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			Similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
National Curriculum test	A*	A*	A*	**
GCSE examinations	A*	A*	A*	**
A-levels/AS-levels	A*	A*	A*	

**Key**

In the top 5% nationally	A*
Well above average	A
Above average	B
Average	C
Below average	D
Well below average	E

\*\* It is inappropriate to make comparisons of the school's overall results with those in selective schools nationally because of the distinctive nature of the profile of ability on entry.

Standards at each stage have been consistently high over the last three years 1997-1999. In the Year 9 national tests, pupils' average scores have been stable over this period. At GCSE the average points scores show a rising trend, with significant improvement in 1999. The school added good value to pupils' results between Key Stage 3 tests in 1997 and GCSE in 1999. At A-level, between 1997 and 1999 the points score rose at twice the rate of the national rise; the average for that period was much the same as nationally. Between GCSE 1997 and A-level 1999 the school added much the same value as expected.

At GCSE most subject results in 1999 are at, or a little higher or lower than the national average for selective schools. This is a good achievement given the wider range of attainment on entry than is usual in selective schools. Although results have been below average in art, they have improved steadily since 1997, with significant improvement in 1999. They further improved in 2000. At A-level there are wide differences between subject results. The high standards achieved at GCSE in French and Spanish are not maintained.

No targets were set for 2000. The 2001 A\*-C target was exceeded in 2000, and the targets met for A\*-G and the average points score.

On entry, while pupils' attainment overall is above average, the range includes a significant proportion of pupils whose attainment is average. The school helps these pupils to raise the standard of their work, and in English to raise it to a standards well above average. Pupils' progress is better than expected and their achievement is good. Overall, in the work seen, including work from the previous year, this above average standard is maintained at each stage. Standards are well above those expected in English at each stage, in art at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, and in geography at Key Stage 3. They are very high in music at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Average standards were seen in the sixth form in French and Spanish, in the non-examination physical education course, and in students' use of ICT across their work in other A-level subjects.



## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good: pupils are interested and enthusiastic about their work; they show that they are in school to learn; there is energetic and committed participation in activities.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent at all times; there have been no exclusions.
Personal development and relationships	Very good: excellent relationships are a particular strength; pupils show thoughtful and friendly concern for others and respect differing viewpoints and beliefs; they take responsibility confidently and sensibly.
Attendance	Consistently very good across all year groups; pupils are punctual.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

- All the teaching is satisfactory or better, and in the great majority of lessons, 80 per cent, the quality is at least good. In 45 per cent of lessons teaching is very good or better, and in 9 per cent it is excellent.
- The strengths are in art and history; in sixth form teaching, particularly in mathematics and design and technology; and in geography and physical education at Key Stage 4.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is a strength, particularly in art and modern languages. Other strengths are teachers' skills in managing pupils, which in science, art and history are outstanding, and the quality of homework planning and marking.
- The teaching of literacy and numeracy skills is good.
- There is some weakness in the day-to-day evaluation of work in modern languages in the sixth form where students are not always given sufficiently helpful comments about their work so that they can make improvements.
- The strengths in pupils' learning are the effort they put into it, their level of interest and good concentration, and their ability to work and think independently. There is very good learning in the sixth form.

At Key Stage 4, National Curriculum subjects were inspected. In the sixth form, those subjects continuing from the National Curriculum were inspected, not those offered in Year 12 for the first time.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form; excellent links with the community to enrich pupils' learning. Statutory requirements for design and technology and ICT are not fully met; because of this the overall judgement on the curriculum has to be that it is unsatisfactory. The school is working to rectify this.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good for the very small number of pupils who have specific needs.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Exceptionally good provision for each aspect of pupils' personal and social development, firmly based on the values of the school's Christian foundation.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Effective arrangements are in place; there are considerable strengths in the approach to ensuring harmonious relationships, good behaviour and attendance, and in teachers' thorough knowledge of individual pupils. An area of weakness, for which improvements are being put in place, is the lack of systematic school tracking of pupils' academic progress.
Partnership with parents	Good: helpful arrangements being set in place to develop this further.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good: outstanding leadership by the headteacher through establishing frameworks for consultation, development and evaluation, and for school management. These provide a very good basis for subject management systems that are appropriate for the school's changed status. Mostly very good subject leadership, showing particularly in departments' positive response to the changes demanded of them.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	At a time of successive and substantial changes, the governors are very effectively establishing new operational procedures for carrying out their responsibilities. Priorities have been wisely and strategically determined. Requirements for the curriculum and information for parents in the prospectus and the governors' annual report are not fully met; these issues are being tackled.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Unsatisfactory because the requirements are not met for staff appraisal and the headteacher's performance review.
The strategic use of resources	Good overall; some weakness in the use of accommodation: too many rooms are used as general teaching spaces with the result that lessons often lack the usual range of equipment and subject resources, especially in English, mathematics and modern languages.
The adequacy of staffing, accommodation & learning resources	Good staffing and resources overall, although technician time there is insufficient in science and lacking in design and technology; there are weaknesses in the accommodation and equipment for work with resistant materials in design and technology. There are not enough computers in departments and access to central resources is limited.
Best value	The school applies the principles of best value well.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their children like school</li> <li>• Children make good progress</li> <li>• Behaviour is good</li> <li>• They feel well-informed about children's progress</li> <li>• They feel comfortable raising questions with the school</li> <li>• Teaching is good</li> <li>• There are high expectations</li> <li>• The school is well led and managed</li> <li>• It helps pupils to become mature and responsible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homework arrangements</li> <li>• The school's working with parents</li> <li>• The range of activities outside lessons</li> </ul>

The 26 per cent of parents who completed questionnaire returns, and the 8 per cent at the pre-inspection meeting, hold the school in exceptionally high regard, especially because they think that expectations are high. Inspectors generally agree with parents' positive views and the strength of their views shown by the analysis. They find that expectations are high, although not as high at Key Stage 3 as at the other two stages, and that pupils make good progress, especially in the sixth form. Inspectors found evidence of the school's endeavours to build a closer partnership with parents, but also of some feeling that this is not yet working as well as it might. They do not agree with the comments about homework, which during the inspection was generally handled well. They find that there is an impressive range of activities outside lessons in which large numbers of pupils are involved.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

1. When pupils enter the school their attainment is above average overall. They achieve well in Year 9 tests: results in English, mathematics and science have been in the top five per cent nationally. The exception was in mathematics in 1998 when the results, while well above average, were not in the top five per cent. Over the period 1997-99, the average points achieved in the three subjects together have remained much the same as they have nationally. Pupils raise well their level of attainment on entry; the school adds good value. It achieves this because the standard of teaching is generally good, and because the school's ethos encourages pupils to become happy and determined learners.
2. Pupils sustain this level of achievement at GCSE. In 1999 their results were in the top five per cent nationally for each of the national comparators for all schools: five or more grades A\*-C, five or more and one or more grades A\*-G, and pupils' average total points score. Over the three years 1997-99, the results at A\*-C and the average total points scores were also in the top five per cent nationally. The results for both the A\*-G comparators were well above average in 1997 and 1998, and improved in 1999. Between 1997 and 1999 the average total points score rose at a much faster rate than nationally. The school adds good value from Key Stage 3 to GCSE.
3. In 1999, the average GCSE points scores in most subjects hovered around the national figures for selective schools in each subject although, on entry, the range of pupils' attainment was broader than is usual in selective schools. The strengths were in English, English literature and French where virtually all the year group took the examination. In subjects with smaller entries the strengths were in biology, chemistry and the other modern languages. The weakness in art showed improvement in 1999 where standards are being raised through excellent department management. The 2000 results show a similar pattern, with a good, further improvement in art. The comparisons of subject differences in the school's results with the picture of subject differences nationally are not currently available for this school.
4. At A-level in 1999, the high standards the year group achieved at GCSE in 1997 were sustained overall, although not in Spanish. Results at A-level have been in the top five per cent nationally for all schools over the three-year period 1997-1999. Even so, pupils' average points score has improved significantly over the period, rising twice as fast as the national rise. Where there was an entry of over twenty in 1999, the subject strength was in English literature. Where the entry was less than twenty, the strengths were in English language and Latin. The points scores in these four subjects rose in 2000. These strong subjects account for the overall standards the school achieves, although in a number of subjects the average points score is below average. Because of this, overall, between GCSE in 1997 and A-level in 1999 the school added no more than the value that would be expected. In comparison with the results for girls in selective schools, the 1999 results in French and Spanish were average. The 2000 results show a fall in French from the 1999 results to below the 1999 average for girls in all schools nationally, comparing unfavourably with the school's GCSE results. The 2000 results were poor in Spanish and well below the 1999 average for girls in all schools nationally; the trend has been a falling one. A main factor is the lack of effective day-to-day evaluation in modern languages which identifies clearly for students the strengths and weaknesses in their work. The small

numbers of students taking A-level economics, home economics and theatre studies gained low grades.

5. In the work seen at Key Stage 3, which included work done throughout the previous academic year, standards overall are above those expected nationally. This is true of standards in mathematics and science. Standards in English are well above those expected, as are the standards in geography. At Key Stage 4, above average standards are maintained overall, with standards well above those expected in English, art, modern languages, and high in music. In the A-level work seen in National Curriculum subjects in the sixth form, above average standards are maintained overall, with standards well above average in English and art, high standards in music, and average standards in ICT, modern languages overall and physical education. Subjects introduced in Year 12 were not inspected except where they extended the National Curriculum in theatre studies. Students are very well supported in their learning by staff expertise and by their mature attitudes to study, which are particular strengths at this stage.
6. In English, pupils at Key Stage 3 are competent speakers and listeners. They respond well to their reading and write interestingly in a variety of styles. At Key Stage 4, they discuss and debate skilfully and show a very good command of different types of writing. In the sixth form students show a thorough knowledge of the theory of language and its development. They show a high level of appreciation of literary technique. In theatre studies, students have a sound understanding of theatre history and many are capable of excellent performances.
7. In mathematics at Key Stage 3, pupils can calculate with fractions and percentages, and use Pythagoras' theorem to calculate the third side of a triangle. They use sine and cosine ratios to solve problems in right-angled triangles. Pupils at Key Stage 4 can apply the standard formula to solve quadratic equations, and use their understanding of sequences to find an expression for the 'n<sup>th</sup>' term. They use percentages to solve problems. In the sixth form, students work confidently with statistics when using and analysing descriptive data and when using algebraic techniques to solve inequalities and sketch polynomials.
8. In science, pupils at Key Stage 3 carry out experiments competently, showing that they can make predictions based on their scientific knowledge and their understanding of fair tests. They know that metals react with acids to form another substance. At Key Stage 4, pupils taking double science show a good understanding of the work on radioactivity. They undertake analyses of results in greater depth and can identify sources of errors. In the sixth form, students' observations become more sophisticated and they comment on the accuracy and reliability of the results of experiments.
9. In art at Key Stage 3, pupils show astute skills of observation and analysis. At Key Stage 4 there is excellence in fine detail work and work with three-dimensional materials. These standards are sustained in the sixth form where some work in all aspects of art is outstanding. Some very exciting work is on display.
10. In design and technology, pupils have a good understanding of the complete design process and the materials they work with, and show an awareness of the user in their planning. This is evident when they plan meals for particular dietary or cultural needs, or develop ethnic themes in their design of soft furnishings and clothes. Pupils are creative and enthusiastic about their designing and making, and work safely and skilfully with tools and materials. By Key Stage 4 they are skilled at product analysis

and use good analytical techniques to aid the design of products in food and textiles.

11. In geography, pupils at Key Stage 3 have a very good knowledge of a wide range of places and are able to contrast the characteristics that affect human and physical circumstances in different regions. They use technical vocabulary well and use and create maps, tables and charts that represent geographical information competently. At Key Stage 4, pupils show good skills in interpreting and evaluating data. Pupils have a good understanding of geographical problems in the places they study and the solutions found, for example, such as ways of addressing the seasonal nature of employment opportunities in Blackpool. In the sixth form, students' knowledge and understanding are generally high, with standards of individual investigation and presentation of findings very good.
12. In history at Key Stage 3, pupils select and combine information from sources, sorting and classifying their ideas, and writing in a variety of forms. At Key Stage 4, pupils evaluate sources and produce different forms of writing including explanation and argument. In the work seen in the sixth form, students at the start of the AS-level course show the potential to achieve above average standards. Their essays are clearly structured, and they demonstrate good research skills and the ability to think critically.
13. In ICT, pupils at Key Stage 3 can access the software quickly and they become competent users. They are fluent in basic operations using the keyboard and mouse. At Key Stage 4, pupils can set up a database using a number of fields. They design logos and displays, for example, of complicated menus. They acquire new knowledge speedily. In the sixth form, students use their computer skills competently in their studies in other subjects.
14. In modern languages, pupils at Key Stage 3 show very good listening skills and have good speaking skills. They write accurately using a variety of tenses and structures. At Key Stage 4, pupils' pronunciation and intonation are good, but because they are often unwilling to speak, they do not develop the ability to speak at length. Their written work is generally good. In the sixth form, students' speaking skills are limited. They show a satisfactory understanding of the reading texts. In French and Spanish their writing is satisfactory; in German it is good.
15. In music, pupils at Key Stage 3 have a good knowledge of the elements of music. They sing well and use keyboards confidently. At Key Stage 4, they perform confidently and accurately and have a good knowledge of technical vocabulary. In the sixth form, students show a high level of musicianship skills.
16. In physical education at Key Stage 3, pupils play games with confidence and have a good knowledge of the rules. The good learning atmosphere generated by pupils enables staff to focus on teaching skills so that standards are raised. At Key Stage 4, pupils use more advanced tactics and skills in their games and are confident when officiating in games. In the sixth form, students start new courses based on recreational activities and attain satisfactory levels of performance by the end of these courses. Throughout the school, pupils have a very good understanding of how to prepare for activity and the importance of exercise in a healthy life-style.
17. The small number of pupils with special needs who are dyslexic or who have hearing impairment make good progress because subject planning takes careful account of their specific sensory needs.

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

18. Pupils' very good attitudes to learning and their excellent behaviour and relationships with others are strengths of the school. Nearly every parent who returned a questionnaire (26 per cent) agreed that their child likes school and inspection evidence supports this. Pupils enjoy school life and are keen to learn. They are very interested in their work. This shows at Key Stage 3, for example, in the many who volunteer to read or answer questions. Pupils listen attentively to what is said by their teachers and by others in the class. Their responses show careful consideration, often after a pause for thought. They contribute thoughtfully to tutor group discussions.
19. There are excellent relationships throughout the school. Year 7 pupils appreciate their 'friendship partners' in Year 8 at the start of the school year. Pupils get on very well with each other, with teachers and with other adults in the school. They talk readily to visitors and are courteous, helpful and very polite. Movement between lessons is orderly although space is at a premium in some circulation areas. Pupils stand aside to allow others to pass, help operate the security codes and hold doors open for each other as well as for adults. The tidy classrooms and absence of litter at the end of the day reflect pupils' pride in their school. Pupils are confident that any incidences of bullying will be quickly dealt with. There have been no exclusions.
20. Pupils' personal development is very good. Nearly all parents who returned the questionnaire agreed that the school helps their children to become mature and responsible. Pupils respond easily and confidently in the various work and social situations which form the school day. They are willing to accept responsibility. Sixth form students take seriously the responsibilities they undertake in the organisation of school affairs; every student has an opportunity for this, for example, serving as a school prefect. The students think that this is one of the school's strengths. Younger pupils help regularly in the library and within their own tutor groups. Older pupils help and support the younger ones. For example they encourage their younger sisters at lunchtime during netball trials and help Year 6 pupils in science as part of a BAYS (British Association Young Scientist) project at the nearby junior school. They contribute significantly to the ethos that encourages and acknowledges success.
21. Attendance is very good. The majority of pupils are punctual.

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

22. Consistently good teaching serves pupils well. All teaching is at least satisfactory; most is at least good, and in nearly half of lessons the quality is very good or excellent. In about a tenth of lessons the teaching is excellent. Excellent teaching was seen in art, history and music at each stage and the sixth form, and in English at Key Stage 4. In addition to the quality seen in these subjects, there is teaching of a very good standard in all the other subjects inspected. This is a very helpful basis for further development. Pupils in Year 7 benefited from very good teaching in which teachers skilfully adjusted their good planning in response to how well pupils were learning; this is a feature of successful teaching, particularly in the first weeks of the school year. The best teaching was seen in the sixth form where in nine out of every ten lessons it was good, and in six out of every ten it was very good or excellent.
23. A school strength is teachers' subject expertise, clearly in evidence in the teaching at all three key stages. This is matched by their knowledge of examination syllabuses and arrangements, for example new AS-level requirements, and the 'new' National

Curriculum. A number of staff are national examiners. Teachers' expertise is used to very good effect so that pupils learn well. This shows particularly in pupils' independence as learners, which usually reflects their confidence in knowing what needs to be done. Pupils are challenged especially well by the work at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. These features contribute significantly to pupils' examination achievements.

24. Teachers' management of pupils is a strength that stems from their shared commitment to Loreto values; they expect and achieve excellent behaviour from pupils. Lessons are generally very pleasant occasions: pupils are willing to put effort into their work, are interested in it and know how to concentrate. The best lessons are stimulating occasions where the excitement of learning is caught from the teacher's enthusiasm. All pupils are treated with equal respect and given the support they need in lessons.
25. All the skills that make for effective teaching are good in this school, and in the majority of lessons they were put into practice well. Where the range of methods has helpful variety and is used well, particularly in encouraging pupils to contribute in lessons, this is a significant feature of very good and excellent teaching. At each of the three stages teachers generally use methods to good effect. Where this was very good, lesson targets were clearly communicated to all the pupils, teachers made time for evaluative discussion with individuals, challenging questions were used which encouraged critical thinking, and the approach invited and expected pupils' confident and active participation. For example, in mathematics, pupils were challenged by the level of work, by the demand to think and by the insistence on precise mathematical language. By contrast, in too many lessons across subjects it was the teacher's voice that was mostly heard. On occasion teachers' questions invited no more than a one-word or one-phrase factual answer, with clues in the questions themselves, so that pupils' thinking was not challenged at all.
26. There is good teaching of basic skills across the school. A feature which holds the quality back is the lack of systematic opportunity across subjects for pupils' oral contributions in class.
27. A further strength is the planning and following up of homework. This finding does not reflect the concerns expressed by some parents. The homework set, for example in English, is a good preparation for subsequent lessons and builds well on work done in class. Homework is regularly set and marked in mathematics and science, and in science it is often imaginatively planned to extend pupils' learning through research.
28. Staff show a good awareness of special individual needs. These are usually noted on lesson plans. There is good provision for those with hearing impairment, for example through ensuring that their seating position in the classroom is suitable and, according to the activities, ensuring that teachers face their pupils. Both teachers and pupils help those who are dyslexic through checking their work and the time allocated for work tasks is suitably adjusted for pupils with dyspraxia.
29. In modern languages the quality of day-to-day assessment and marking is not always sufficiently rigorous across the department. This can have a limiting effect on pupils' progress, particularly in the sixth form.

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

30. At Key Stages 3 and 4 the quality of the curriculum and the range of learning



opportunities are good. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. However, the overall provision is unsatisfactory because the requirements for ICT at each key stage and for design and technology at Key Stage 3 are not fully met. The school is fully aware of this: the curriculum was reviewed in the previous academic year to introduce more elements of design and technology for all pupils. Every effort is made to ensure that all educational experiences, both curricular and extra-curricular, are open to all pupils. Pupils play a full part in decision-making about their choice of GCSE and sixth form courses.

31. The school provides all subjects of the national curriculum and religious education. While time allocations for subjects in both Key Stages 3 and 4 are mostly appropriate, time for design and technology and physical education at Key Stage 3 and for ICT, design and technology and modern languages at Key Stage 4 are below those usually provided in secondary schools. There are department concerns that where time allocations are low there may be a negative effect on standards. The school is rightly keeping the curriculum implemented in September 2000 under review.
32. Provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is excellent. A well planned programme of lessons, covering specific topics concerned with health, sex and drugs education, supports the values expressed through the daily life of the school. Pupils have opportunities to suggest topics they wish to discuss within the programme. The school makes very good use of experts from outside the school in personal and social education lessons. Careful attention is paid to the way topics are to be introduced and the success of the programme is reviewed each year. The strong emphasis on the school as a community, and the contribution of all pupils and adults to the community, have a strong and positive influence on pupils' personal development and preparation for adult life.
33. Pupils receive good careers education and guidance from Year 9. The programme of guidance is well planned, comprehensive and supported by helpful booklets. There is good co-operation with the careers service. The programme is closely co-ordinated and benefits from a specialist team of staff and form tutors' contribution to the programme. All the teachers involved in the careers programme are well informed; the staff handbook gives helpful guidelines for staff should they be approached for careers advice. Through discussion and review, good use is made of the period of work experience in Year 10 that supplements the taught programme. This is true of the day work placements undertaken by students in Year 12. Good information is provided to ensure that the few pupils who choose to leave at 16 make informed choices about the next stage in their life. The great majority of pupils enter higher education at 18. The school is conscious of the need to ensure that pupils consider the widest possible range of courses when making their choices.
34. Links with the community beyond the school are a particular strength of the curriculum. With partner primary schools, these are very effective in ensuring that pupils settle quickly into Year 7 and that there is a smooth transition in subject work. Pupils contribute to the strength of these links; for example sixth form students are closely involved in helping primary pupils with investigative work in science. The curriculum is enriched by visits to museums and galleries and by field trips. Almost all subjects have well planned visits during the year. Older pupils gain from visits to other schools within the Loreto Foundation, both in this country and abroad. There is extensive extra-curricular provision for games, music and clubs, which are well supported by pupils and involve considerable additional time from staff. For example, in music these include junior and senior choirs, an orchestra and a swing orchestra. The wide variety of additional curricular opportunities makes an excellent contribution

to pupils' learning. Inspectors do not agree with the view expressed by some parents that extra-curricular provision is limited.

35. The school's mission statement derives from the Christian gospels. Provision for pupils' personal development fully reflects the values of the school's religious foundation and ethical roots; for each of the aspects of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development it is excellent. School life is built on the principles of mutual care and responsibility which govern pupils' contacts and activity with the local community. These values are strongly reflected in the prospectus which concludes with a quotation from Nelson Mandela about humanity and its fears, rights and responsibilities.
36. Spiritual development is strongly promoted. Pupils are encouraged to develop insight into their own beliefs and those of others. This is well supported by the programme of retreats for pupils from Year 7 upwards, including residential experiences and joint retreats with other schools. Work in personal and social education is focused on pupils learning to live by a clear set of values. They are encouraged to question these and to reflect on them. In English, the poem 'Blessing' acted as a stimulus for class discussion of the role of God in the world. Pupils are taught to value the excellent relationships evident in the school. Following a visit to Jodrell Bank, the work in science evoked a sense of awe and wonder at the immensity of creation.
37. The school's mission statement and the work of the Loreto Institute provide the basis for the moral values taught by the school. Moral principles such as honesty, fairness, mutual respect and a love of truth and justice are promoted by example and by expectation. A current initiative in moral education is pupils' involvement with the Catholic Association for Racial Justice.
38. The school welcomes, values and supports all its pupils as individuals and teaches them to respond to others in the same way. Pupils are taught to abide by rules as part of their membership of the school community. The new citizenship course encourages pupils' understanding of social codes beyond school life. Pupils are encouraged to contribute actively to the welfare of others, for example through major fundraising activities for charity co-ordinated by students in the sixth form. The Year 8 partner for each Year 7 pupil is charged with offering her help and support. During the inspection, this was celebrated in a friendship mass. Many subjects focus on the natural world in their curriculum, for example through looking at environmental issues in geography, and the impact on society of new technology and ICT.
39. Pupils are taught to value their own and other cultures. There is an effective programme about learning to live in a multi-cultural society, which is particularly strong in religious education, personal and social education, science, art and geography. Cultural development is supported through the good programme of visits, for example, to galleries and museums and to Stratford. Pupils are encouraged to develop an open and enquiring attitude to differing cultural traditions. This is done well in art, for example through looking at work from the African, Indonesian, Japanese and Chinese traditions. There are very strong links with the Loreto Community worldwide and some pupils take advantage of these links when planning their gap year after leaving school.

### **Sixth Form**

40. The strong sixth form plays an important role in the life of the school. A very high proportion of pupils choose to stay on into Years 12 and 13 where the provision of A-

and AS-level courses meets their needs and aspirations very well. Advanced vocational courses are not offered. The range of subjects is wide, covering the range of National Curriculum subjects and theatre studies, Latin, economics, classical civilisation, sociology and Christian theology. Although pupils' choice from this wide range results in some small teaching groups, for example, in German, Latin and economics, sixth form organisation and cost effectiveness are efficient overall. A very thorough guidance procedure and the high standards achieved in GCSE ensure that pupils choose courses for which they are suited. There is a good awareness of alternative opportunities provided by other local institutions for the small proportion of pupils who are not suited by the school's own provision. There is objective advice and good support for these pupils, almost all of whom successfully transfer. There is virtually no non-completion of sixth form courses.

41. The newly refurbished library provides a good range of resources to support individual sixth form work and an excellent environment for quiet study and reflection. The librarian has a good understanding of individual study needs and of how these can be addressed.
42. The school offers a very good curriculum to supplement sixth form examination courses. All students have a weekly physical education lesson, with a wide range of options so that even those who are less athletic have a good chance of finding one that will suit them. Religious education has a significant place in the sixth form curriculum with three lessons a week for all students. The new key skills course is well planned. It incorporates lessons in communication, application of number and ICT, and a personal and social education component which addresses skills of working with others, improving performance and problem solving. The school acknowledges that these courses involve some very new approaches for teachers and students. They have been well planned.

43. A considerable strength of the sixth form is the extent to which the curriculum is enriched by opportunities for students to fulfil responsible and worthwhile roles in the school and the extent to which these are taken up. Students are enthusiastic about their experiences in the sixth form. They speak highly of their relationships with each other and with their teachers and refer to the sixth form as a happy family community. In addition to all having prefect duties, sixth formers can be elected to a sixth form committee and have a representative on the school's library committee. They provide considerable support for younger pupils, for example through running science and geography clubs and holding a fancy-dress party for Year 7 pupils soon after they arrive at the school. Involvement in the community outside the school is considerable. Students frequently undertake voluntary work for local primary schools, charities and businesses. For example, each year there is an appeal week for charity, which includes a fashion show for which students persuade local stores and shops to loan clothes. The temporary arrangements for sixth form assemblies, in which students stand in lines throughout the proceedings, do not support well the dignity of students and the quality of the occasion.

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

44. The school is a caring community. The head teacher takes the lead in setting the ethos of care and order so valued by parents. All pupils are treated equally in terms of educational and personal support. Staff are approachable and responsive to pupils' needs and the quality of the support they give is good. The registration period at the start of each day provides some good opportunities for pupil support and guidance. The good atmosphere in these sessions reflected the good relationships between tutors and their forms being established or consolidated in the first full week of term.
45. A draft child protection policy, based on local authority policy, awaits governor approval. The newly designated staff member is currently receiving training and staff are aware of child protection procedures. Health and safety and risk assessment procedures are under review with clear arrangements now in place for most subjects. Fire notices are posted appropriately around the school. There are regular fire drills with additional ones at the start of the academic year for the Year 7 pupils. Good arrangements are in place for first aid.
46. The school expects high standards of behaviour. Staff know pupils very well, value them as individuals, and also expect their best responses at all times. The school makes sure that staff, parents and pupils are fully aware of the rules and sanctions and parents are informed about all instances of inappropriate behaviour. There are very thorough procedures for following up absences and lateness and for monitoring attendance.
47. Procedures for monitoring pupils' academic progress are not in place, although systems are being developed. Information about pupils' attainment on entry is being collected from the school's own testing and pupils' results at Key Stage 2.
48. There is excellent advice and support for special needs from the local education authority through monitoring pupils' progress and providing staff training. The school has recently introduced a procedure for dyslexia screening for use where individual pupils are causing concern.

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

49. The partnership with parents is very good. Parents' views of the school are extremely supportive and positive. All the parents who completed the questionnaire think that the school has high expectations for their children. Nearly all agreed that they feel comfortable about approaching the school with problems or questions. Parents are appreciative of the way in which the school is led and managed and the caring ethos that promotes good learning, and social and moral values. The home-school agreement was formally agreed by all the parents and their children. It reflects the school's values in the way it identifies the equal importance of each of the partners.
50. There is much encouragement for parents to become involved in school life and in the Loreto parent-teacher association. Parents help with netball coaching, with transport for inter-school matches and with educational visits. Parents of pupils with special needs are invited to discuss support strategies with a designated member of staff. There is exceptionally high attendance at the consultation evenings.
51. The quality of information provided for parents is satisfactory. Regular newsletters keep parents up to date with school affairs. An annual magazine includes work from the primary school. The prospectus and the governors' annual report to parents do not include all the required information and are to be revised during the current academic year. Pupils' annual progress reports, although comprehensive, do not always contain sufficient information about attainment or set any specific targets for the pupils. The reports for sixth form students contain more specific information and targets.
52. Some parents expressed concern about the homework received by their children and the lack of extra-curricular activities. The inspection team found that homework is generally well planned and followed up, and that the school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities.

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

53. The headteacher has been in post for one year. Her leadership and management at a time of very substantial change are outstanding. With the changed status in 1997 from independent to grant-maintained, when she was chair of governors, came the imperative to develop financial procedures to meet requirements. The governing body's response, as shown in minutes of meetings, was exemplary. Financial management is very good. There has been good use of school resources to effect the necessary changes, particularly of the grants available during the transition period. Training grant was used wisely for subject and management updating during the last academic year. The subsequent change to voluntary-aided status brought the need for substantial administrative development in collaboration with the local education authority. From a position of overstaffing and a curriculum which did not offer the full range of National Curriculum subjects, sufficient change to rectify this has been effected through staff resignation and reduction. The judgement that statutory requirements are not fully met is made against the background of notable development, with those matters which are outstanding planned for development in the current academic year. The school is very well served by its governors who carry out their responsibilities thoroughly and rigorously, with a clear vision for the school's future and a good sense of momentum for change – as well as a good sense of humour.
54. Good care is taken to achieve best value, for example through detailed attention to the costings and contractual requirements for school catering. In the last year there has been a focus on consultation, for example, through setting up regular times when parents can meet with the headteacher. A parent survey was carried out. All pupils

were involved in selecting the school's Christmas card for 1999. The school is beginning to look at its performance critically in comparison to other schools to check that pupils are making the progress of which they are capable. Thoroughgoing review and revision of the curriculum led to the school's curriculum 2000, now in place. Careers advice for post-16 study takes full account of other providers in supporting individuals to make their choice. The current pattern of room allocations for subject teaching, however, does not reflect the application of best value principles.

55. Leadership and management by heads of subject are mostly very good. The most effective development has been in the curriculum at each stage. There are strengths from which the school benefits. For example, the management of the art curriculum has brought about good improvement in standards at GCSE. In history, arrangements for tracking pupils' progress are already in place and staff use pupils' assessments and results to evaluate the effectiveness of the history curriculum. In music, staffing difficulties have not been allowed to affect the range and quality of music activities both in and outside the curriculum. The preparation for the National Curriculum 2000 has been exemplary in English. The science department is beginning to evaluate its performance meticulously. In mathematics the head of department sets a very good example by his own teaching. The range of activities for pupils of all abilities is a strong feature of the physical education department. In geography there is a clear vision of the way the subject should develop in the school.
56. The co-ordination of the provision for pupils with hearing impairment is very good. Staff are well informed about pupils' special needs. Links with the local education authority's sensory support service are very good. However, the requirements of the Code of Practice are not in place: there is no published policy for special educational needs and the governors' annual report does not include a report on the school's provision.
57. The school's strong commitment to equality of opportunity is reflected in its statement of aims and values. The draft policy on equal opportunities is centred on Christian belief, on the equality of all in the eyes of God and in the uniqueness of each individual. In its work, the school makes every effort to put this policy into practice. It does so very successfully. The school's work from day to day demonstrates the Loreto aims and values with both vigour and sensitivity.
58. Procedures for monitoring the school's performance in terms of test and examination results are being put in place. Heads of subject undertook an analysis of their 2000 examination results and governors have discussed the school's PANDA (Performance and Assessment) information from the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE). The process is at an early stage and is supported by data from the local education authority. The requirements for staff appraisal have not been met. Procedures for monitoring the school's performance in terms of the quality of teaching are not in place although this is a development target for the current year. Without the information about strengths and weaknesses learned from the school's monitoring the governors cannot account for the school's performance with confidence. This is a weakness.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

59. The following key issues are in their order of importance for raising standards in the school. They should be included in the governors' post-inspection action plan.

- (1) Raise standards at A-level in French and Spanish  
*through*
  - improving the quality of teaching across the subject
  - establishing focused learning targets for all lessons
  - ensuring that students' work is rigorously marked with clear evaluations of strengths and weaknesses
  - identifying higher attainers and planning work with suitable challenge for them
  - ensuring consistent attention to the standard and quality of oral and written work across the subject
  - amending schemes of work to ensure clear progression from year to year (paragraphs 4, 5, 14, 25-6, 29, 73, 94, 96, 116, 127, 150-3, 155-8, 172)
  
- (2) Meet fully the requirements for ICT, design and technology and the information to be provided for parents  
*for ICT, through*
  - implementing systematically the planning already underway for ICT provision across all subjects of the curriculum
  - monitoring pupils' ICT work sufficiently in all subjects for standards and coverage to be reviewed and evaluated annually (paragraphs 30-1, 144, 147, 164)  
*for design and technology, through*
  - providing for the control aspects of ICT and design and technology
  - providing for work with resistant materials in design and technology
  - ensuring that sufficient technical support is allocated to avoid teachers having to act as technicians in design and technology (paragraphs 53, 117)  
*for information to parents, through*
  - ensuring that pupils' annual reports include clear information about their strengths and weaknesses in each subject with targets for improvement
  - including all the contents required in the governors' annual report to parents (paragraphs 51, 56)
  
- (3) Monitor pupils' progress from entry  
*through*
  - ensuring that all staff are well informed about the information now being collected on pupils' attainment from entry
  - establishing target setting for individual pupils across the school as part of the process of tracking their progress across subjects
  - undertaking school reviews of pupils' work across subjects to ensure that they are progressing as they should
  - reporting to all staff and governors on the findings of this tracking and monitoring in terms of strengths and weaknesses (paragraphs 47, 51, 54-5, 58, 83, 127, 145, 158)
  
- (4) Monitor the quality of teaching  
*through*

- completing the planned development of performance management and appraisal processes
- including an annual programme of lesson observation and curriculum monitoring in the school calendar
- focusing the monitoring on aspects for development across the school such as the opportunities for pupils' spoken contributions in lessons
- providing opportunity for all staff to take a monitoring role
- reporting to governors on the findings of this monitoring in terms of strengths and weaknesses  
(paragraphs 25, 58, 97)

(5) Improve the use of accommodation  
*to ensure that*

- all departments, particularly the English and modern languages departments, benefit from a group of rooms equipped and resourced as specialist teaching spaces
- the number of different rooms in which subjects and staff are timetabled is reduced to a minimum  
(paragraphs 54, 71, 158, 160)

60. There are no additional weaknesses identified in the report which are not included in the main areas for action to improve standards.



## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	166
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	55

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
9	36	35	20	0	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	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	623	185
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	17	

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	5	1

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	12

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	74
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	5

### Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	4.5
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.0
National comparative data	1.1

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		1999	0	123

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	123	123	123
	Total	123	123	123
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	91 (98)	89 (84)	87 (81)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	123	123	123
	Total	123	123	123
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (99)	100 (99)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	91(95)	91(86)	91(86)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	0	109	109

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	0	0	0
	Girls	103	109	109
	Total	103	109	109
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	94 (97)	100 (98)	100 (100)
	National	46.6 (45)	90.9 (90)	95.8 (95)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	66.0 (55.1)
	National	38.0 (36.8)

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

### Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	0	94	94

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	0	24.3	24.3 (24.3)	0	0	0 (0)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.8)

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

<b>Ethnic background of pupils</b>		<b>Exclusions in the last school year</b>			
	No: of pupils			Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	4		Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	2		Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	6		Black – other	0	0
Indian	1		Indian	0	0
Pakistani	1		Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0		Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	3		Chinese	0	0
White	663		White	0	0
Any other minority ethnic group	8		Other minority ethnic groups	0	0
Unclassified	12				
			<i>This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.</i>		

### **Teachers and classes**

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	54.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.9 : 1

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	4
Total aggregate hours worked per week	148

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72.3
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13**

Key Stage 3	29
Key Stage 4	20

### **Financial information**

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	2,013,978
Total expenditure	2,021,894
Expenditure per pupil	2,521
Balance brought forward from previous year	24,657
Balance carried forward to next year	16,741

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	808
Number of questionnaires returned	211

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	52	42	4	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	59	37	4	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	46	48	3	0	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	32	49	15	3	1
The teaching is good.	48	50	0	0	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	34	54	2	1	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	50	40	8	1	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	77	23	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	27	53	15	3	2
The school is well led and managed.	48	45	3	1	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	54	43	2	0	0
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	39	42	13	3	3

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

The comparisons made about subject standards at each stage are made using average points scores.  
All National Curriculum subjects were inspected at each key stage.

### **ENGLISH**

62. The 1999 GCSE results in both English and English literature were very high in comparison with national figures, and broadly in line with those for girls in selective schools despite the fact that the school takes in pupils with a broader range of ability than most selective schools. There has been a steady improvement in both subjects.
63. In the Year 9 National Curriculum tests in 1999, results in English were very high in comparison to the national average. Over the period 1996 to 1999 a similar standard was achieved. In 2000, the proportion of pupils gaining the highest levels 7 and 8 rose significantly.
64. In both A-level English language and English literature, pupils' performance in 1999 was very high in comparison to the national average and above that for girls in selective schools. The proportion gaining the highest grades A and B was significantly higher than that for selective schools. From 1997 to 2000, there has been a steady and substantial improvement in both subjects. A small number of pupils has taken the theatre studies course to A-level, and although the average points score in 1999 was lower than the national average, all candidates have passed the examination in recent years.
65. On entry to the school, pupils' attainment in English is above the standard expected nationally. In the work seen during the inspection, standards were well above national expectations by the end of each key stage. Pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 are very competent speakers and listeners, and their responses to the books they read are very good. They make detailed and perceptive analyses of plot and relationships in novels and plays, basing their judgements firmly on the words and actions of the characters. For example, after very brief preparation, Year 9 pupils read aloud a ballad by Wordsworth with clarity and expression, and they built up a vivid picture of the characters from the clues they found in the poem. They write in a variety of styles in a convincing and interesting way. For example, they produced authentic and amusing pastiches of an estate agent's flyer, using computer graphics and word-processing with considerable skill. All pupils, including those with special needs, make good progress during Key Stage 3.
66. At Key Stage 4, pupils continue to achieve very high standards. They can maintain a discussion or debate at a high level, and use the sound of language to very good effect. This was shown during one of the highlights of the inspection week, when two groups of Year 11 pupils devised and performed highly original vocal orchestrations of a poem that had a truly spiritual quality. Pupils' written commentaries on a wide range of reading – from 'Macbeth' to 'Jane Eyre' and a selection of modern poems from different cultures – show very good understanding and appreciation of the writers' differing styles and messages. Their own writing shows a very good command of different types of writing and an excellent sense of the intended readership. Pupils' word-processing skills are very good, and they make good progress over this key stage.
67. In the sixth form, the students taking A-level English language produce a very good variety of original pieces for reading and speaking. They show a thorough knowledge

of the theory of language and its development. Their analysis of style in different texts is comprehensive and perceptive. In A-level English literature, students show very good understanding of the social context and themes of classic novels such as 'Wuthering Heights' and the plays of Shakespeare. They build on the skills of critical analysis already established at Key Stage 4, make apt references to their wider reading and show a very high level of appreciation of literary technique. In A-level theatre studies, students demonstrate a sound understanding of theatre history and stage technique. Much of their essay work is original and thoughtful, for example bringing out contemporary themes in production notes for 'The Tempest'. In practical sessions many students are capable of excellent performances. This was evident in a scene from 'Dancing at Lughnasa' explored in Year 13 where characterisation and timing were developing towards professional standards. Good progress in all courses continues throughout the sixth form.

68. Throughout the school, pupils have a very good attitude to learning in English. During Key Stage 3 they settle very quickly to work and give their full attention to the subject. They are very keen to do well, working very effectively in pairs and groups when required. There are always many volunteers to read and to answer questions. Homework is completed in good time and with very good effort. Behaviour is excellent in all lessons. As pupils move through Key Stage 4 they become more independent learners. In some lessons they were seen to organise themselves with only occasional intervention by the teacher. Nearly all pupils are still enthusiastic about English at this stage, and that is carried on into the sixth form where students are highly motivated and ready to ask for help when needed. They study very hard and produce their work on time and in great detail. They work very well with each other when given the opportunity for discussion and group enquiry, but they were less forthcoming in class discussions during some of the lessons seen. The great majority of pupils enjoy their English studies.
69. Overall, the quality of English teaching is good at all stages. The common characteristic of all the teachers of English is their enthusiasm, which is conveyed to the pupils. This is backed up by very good subject knowledge which gives their pupils sound guidance and generates confidence. The quality of teachers' reading to the class is very high; it secures pupils' interest and provides a good model. Marking and assessment of pupils' work are regular, encouraging and helpful. In most lessons, the objectives are clearly stated, although they are sometimes stated simply as tasks to be achieved rather than targets for learning. In the best lessons pupils are made well aware of what they are expected to learn as well as what they are expected to do. This enables them to understand the purpose of what they are doing and to measure their own progress in learning. Generally teachers manage the learning well and give appropriate attention to all pupils. Their encouraging manner gives pupils confidence to take risks, to confide any difficulties and to raise their performance. In most lessons the questioning is challenging and pupils are led to develop their own ideas, but in a minority of lessons too much teacher talk denies them the opportunity to do so. The range of learning opportunities is generally good. However, in the study of plays pupils can be confined to reading the play around the class. Such a desk-bound approach restricts pupils' ability to appreciate the full dramatic impact that group reading and performance were seen to achieve in theatre studies lessons.
70. Very good homework and study habits have been established, and the homework set by teachers is always either a good preparation for future lessons or a logical development of work done in class. Adjustment to the new school day and the changed length of teaching periods calls for the careful planning of time. In the few lessons where this quality of planning was not evident, work was either left

uncompleted or proved insufficient for the time available. Learning in the classroom is enriched by a very good range of extra-curricular activities. For example, Year 9 pupils visit Dove Cottage, Year 11 pupils attend poetry days and there are frequent visits to the theatre. Debating and public speaking are encouraged by entry to competitions, and the drama clubs in Years 7-9 are very well attended.

71. The English department is very well led and managed and is making a very substantial contribution to the education of all pupils in the school. Documentation is detailed and purposeful, and the teachers share a strong commitment to the school's aims. Schemes of work are well balanced and cover very well the requirements of the National Curriculum and examination syllabuses. The preparation for the National Curriculum 2000 has been exemplary. Although resources for teaching, books in particular, are adequate and well cared for, the lack of any specialist rooms for the teaching of English is a weakness. This has an effect on the work of the department. Time is lost, and teachers' use of computers and audio-visual aids is restricted. Opportunities are very limited for display of work to stimulate and to celebrate achievement in English, although effectively used when they are available. Informal day-to-day communication and discussion between teachers are made very difficult.

#### Literacy across all subjects

72. The school has recently drawn up a policy for promoting pupils' development of literacy skills across the curriculum. The majority of subject departments already have their own strategies in place and many provide a good learning environment for this purpose. Opportunities are still being developed to encourage pupils to build their skills in speaking and listening, reading and writing in all subjects. Speaking and listening skills are encouraged particularly well in history, art, physical education and design technology. There is good encouragement to read and research texts in history although reading aloud does not feature in many subjects. The science department encourages participation in a poetry competition, and varied writing tasks are given in history and geography. Overall the current provision, though limited, is effective.
73. Pupils' competence in speaking and listening is generally good in most subjects, although there is some reluctance to contribute to class discussion. Pupils show very good listening comprehension in modern languages and physical education and they report back to the class effectively in history, geography and mathematics. Extended writing is seen at its best in history. Good work in analytical writing is a feature of art, particularly in the sixth form. Overall, the level of competence is very good at all stages.



## MATHEMATICS

74. The results at GCSE in 1999 were well above the national average and slightly below those for girls in selective schools. The proportion of pupils gaining higher grades has remained stable at 97 per cent for the last three years, but there was a fall in the number of pupils gaining an A\* grade in June 2000.
75. The results of the Year 9 tests were substantially the same for each of the three years 1997 to 1999 and very high compared to the national averages. The results for 2000 were higher than those for any of the preceding three years.
76. Students' results in A-level mathematics in 1999 were below the national average. However the trend since 1998 shows a gradual improvement in average point scores from 4.79 in 1998 to 6.00 (equivalent to a C grade) in 2000.
77. The work seen during the inspection was generally above the standards expected and contains some very good features. For example, Year 7 pupils can use long multiplication to evaluate products such as  $2.7 \times 3.5$ , and use estimation, together with their understanding of place value, to determine the correct position for the decimal point. Year 9 pupils can use their understanding of the co-ordinate system to explain why a given triangle has two equal sides and hence show that it is isosceles. They can factorise a quadratic expression into two brackets and use them to solve the quadratic equation. At Key Stage 4, pupils can use known facts about angles, lines and segments within a circle to solve geometrical problems. They draw diagrams to represent vector quantities and know how to use vector notation to calculate, for example, the vector representing the third side of a triangle. Students taking A-level mathematics can divide, factorise and graph polynomials, use descriptive statistics and analyse different types of data. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, pupils use and apply their mathematical knowledge and skills effectively in coursework tasks.
78. Over each stage pupils make steady progress. On entry the majority of pupils are working at levels above those expected and by the end of Key Stage 3 their performance is comparatively high. Good progress in levels of understanding was observed among pupils in Year 9, for example when solving area problems relating to polygons drawn on a co-ordinate grid. Pupils in Year 10 learned how to use their previous knowledge of the graph  $y = x^3$  to sketch graphs of similar functions such as  $y = (x - 2)^2 + 4$  identifying key points on the graph. Students beginning their AS-level course applied considerable mental effort to understand their first example of 'proof by contradiction'. Challenging work, coupled with good planning and a focus on ensuring that pupils understand, is a feature of the lessons in which pupils make significant progress in their learning.
79. Pupils arrive at lessons ready to work. They bring the required equipment, their behaviour is very good and their attitude to work shows interest and application. They show respect both to the teacher and to their peers by listening and responding to questions and suggestions. Their attitude makes an important contribution to their learning. For example, pupils help each other by sharing equipment unobtrusively. Their listening skills contribute significantly to their understanding as they as they follow the teacher's probing questions, designed to help them refine and improve the accuracy of their answers. Pupils' willingness to ask questions, and to say when something is not clearly understood, not only helps their own learning but also that of others in the group.

80. Teaching is good overall, and very good in over half the lessons seen. All teachers are good mathematicians and their enthusiasm for the subject is evident in all lessons. Basic numeracy is well taught and accurate spelling encouraged. Teachers' planning is effective; one of the reasons is that teachers take care to find out from their assessments of pupils' work what aspects of their planning need to be modified. Whole-class teaching methods that involve pupil participation are widely employed. They are generally effective because there is an insistence on pupils' full attention to maximise the opportunities for learning. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils, demand good standards of work and establish good relationships with them. They manage them well. Pupils feel secure through knowing exactly what is expected of them and feel supported in knowing that they can ask for help when they need it.
81. Teachers regularly mark pupils' work, and pupils check some themselves. Assessment at the end of Key Stage 3 is generally accurate and that of examination coursework is good. Regular homework is set and is used to consolidate what is learned in class. Teachers make very good use of the time in lessons.
82. Where the quality of teaching is very good, teachers use especially probing questions to tease out pupils' partial understanding and refine it, either by giving further explanation or by stepping back to a more concrete illustration. Pupils are very well challenged by the level of work, by the demand to think clearly, and by the insistence on precise mathematical expression. Evaluative marking comments and evaluative points in discussion of homework ensure that pupils understand how they can improve their work. These features encourage pupils to work hard, both intellectually and productively, and maximise their learning opportunities.
83. The mathematics curriculum has some particular strengths. It is well balanced at all stages, and enhanced by activities such as the maths club and participation in Loreto as well as United Kingdom 'Maths Challenges'. The department has an open access policy for sixth form courses, offering a choice of three AS-level courses in Year 12 leading to A-level mathematics in Year 13. However, at Key Stage 3, pupils have few opportunities to develop an independent approach to problem-solving that would enable them to explore and evaluate alternative strategies and to present concise and reasoned written explanations of their solutions. There are limited opportunities for the good use of mathematical software although there are plans to rectify this in the near future. Records of pupils' results are efficiently kept and used in conjunction with teachers' own knowledge of individuals to make judgements about pupils' teaching groups. However, the results of pupils' assessments are not used sufficiently to monitor whether they are making the progress of which they are capable.
84. The head of department, an enthusiastic mathematician, leads a committed team of teachers who each contribute a great deal to the mathematics department, and, through their commitment to extra-curricular activities, to the school as a whole. He ensures that best use is made of all resources, supports the teachers well and makes effective provision for professional development. He sets a very good example by his own inspiring teaching. Development planning is good. Measures to improve standards are being put in place. Changes to the A-level syllabuses have been made well. Features of the national numeracy strategy are incorporated into lesson planning, and an investigation of the reasons for the lower than expected number of A\* grades at GCSE in 2000 is underway. Teachers contribute to the initial training of teachers through links with Manchester Metropolitan University and members of the department have benefited from their involvement with the examination board.

## Numeracy across all subjects

85. At all stages, pupils have the numerical skills required to cope with the curriculum and everyday life. The use of numeracy is a strength in science; students' algebraic and graphical skills are used well in advanced level science subjects. They analyse statistical information in history and geography and produce appropriate displays of data from spreadsheets in ICT. Numeracy skills are developed in a number of ways in design and technology. There is a clear emphasis on developing numeracy throughout the mathematics department with strong encouragement of mental activities and mental methods.

## SCIENCE

86. Over the past four years and in the 1999 national tests in Year 9 results were very high in comparison to the national average. The 1999 results were an improvement on those of the previous year. Provisional results for 2000 show standards being maintained, with improvement at the highest Level 8.
87. At GCSE in 1999, results were well above the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining A\*-C grades in the double science award was very high. Results in both the double award science and the separate sciences were broadly in line with the average for girls in selective schools. Since the introduction of double science in 1999, results in biology and chemistry have improved and remained steady in physics. Provisional results for 2000 in double science were similar to those achieved in 1999, and in the separate sciences show a slight fall. The 2000 results are higher in biology than in chemistry and physics.
88. Results at A-level in 1999 were well above the national average in biology and above the average for girls in selective schools. Chemistry and physics results were similar to the national average. The proportion of A grades was well above average for girls in selective schools in biology and all students gained grades A-D. Results for 2000 show a decline in biology but notable improvement in the proportion of A-B grades achieved in chemistry and physics.
89. On entry pupils' attainment is above average. In the work seen, standards are above those expected at the end of Year 9. Early in Year 7, for example, pupils know that metals react with acids to form another substance, write a word equation to summarise what happens and begin to recognise chemical symbols. In Year 9, they understand why glucose is a reactive substance and, therefore, not stored by plants; they accurately plot magnetic field lines around magnets. They competently carry out experiments showing their understanding of predictions based on scientific knowledge and fair tests. Pupils' planning skills develop well when not constrained by too much guidance from teachers. For example, when wisely left to solve a problem about what needs to be done to make a baking case fall very slowly, pupils sharpened their own plans so that they learnt effectively about force and linear motion. Opportunities are not always taken for planning class experiments. Too often a method recalls what has already been done and is written as a recipe. Results are not always sufficiently analysed for detailed conclusions to be made.
90. Standards overall at the end of Year 11 are above those expected. In learning more about radioactivity in double science, Year 10 pupils know that when an atom with a very large nucleus is bombarded with neutrons, the new atoms formed are themselves radioactive. The highest attainers studying the separate sciences

achieve very good standards. This is clearly illustrated in precise technical explanations of the actions of lymphocyte blood cells in defeating pathogens caused by infections. In Year 11, pupils identify sources of error and extend their conclusions from deeper analyses of results, although their course work shows that they have some difficulty in using their own knowledge of science ideas and research in their evaluations.

91. In the sixth form standards are well above those expected in biology, broadly at the expected standards in chemistry and slightly below in physics. Where there are variations within subjects these are usually linked to the broad range of attainment of students accepted on the course, particularly in physics. In the work seen, the complexities of harmonic motion are successfully tackled, changes in oxygen concentration in the tracheae when insects' spiracles open are succinctly explained, and effective support is given to students in calculating the extent to which energy is dispersed in chemical reactions. Students become more skilled at interpreting their findings as teaching continues to emphasise what is expected. Observations become more sophisticated as they comment upon the accuracy and reliability of experiment results, for example, while investigating the relationship and distribution of lichens and mosses on oak trees. There are very good opportunities for pupils to think and operate as young scientists through experiments done outside lessons, for instance, through the flourishing British Association of Young Scientists club (BAYS) superbly organised for pupils in Years 7 and 8 by sixth formers.
92. The use of numeracy is a strength of the department. Pupils quickly develop mathematical skills because of the many opportunities they have to practise calculations and use formulae. They make very good progress because of the teachers' expertise and high level of support. Year 7 pupils quickly become confident in using new equipment to measure accurately voltage and current in electrical circuits. What happens during the 'furring' of a kettle is correctly represented as a chemical equation in Year 10 and, in the sixth form, there are examples of outstanding performance in dealing with complex problems surrounding elasticity.
93. Standards of handwriting and the presentation of notes and two-dimensional diagrams are very high. Scientific vocabulary is used very well because all teachers encourage the development of technical language. Pupils capably enter the national 'Poetry in Science' competition. Speaking skills, however, are noticeably underdeveloped; there are too few occasions when pupils enquire more deeply into a topic and apply ideas through discussion. Teachers are keen to use computers and the Internet, but restricted access curtails much work. In learning more about photosynthesis, Year 10 pupils use sensors to measure the amount of oxygen in an aquarium. The highest attainers throughout the school record investigations to a very high standard.
94. The overall quality of teaching is good at Key Stage 3, satisfactory at Key Stage 4, and very good in the sixth form. It is reflected in the quality of pupils' learning. This varies between science subjects; it is satisfactory at Key Stage 4 and good overall in the sixth form, often very good. Pupils with special needs learn well because of good support from teachers who know them well. Teachers have high expectations of effort, behaviour and attainment and most pupils are eager to learn about science. However, the highest attainers are not sufficiently and rigorously challenged and this can limit their progress. Homework is regularly set and is often imaginative in extending pupils' learning through research. Most teachers mark work in encouraging and helpful ways. The best teaching gives pupils clear indications about how well they are progressing, checks that teacher's comments are acted upon and

encourages pupils to pass comments back about their understanding or misconceptions.

95. Teachers are strikingly knowledgeable and enthusiastic. They have several strengths. For example, because of their teacher's specialist knowledge and perceptive lesson planning, students in Year 12 develop good practical techniques for the accurate volumetric analysis necessary in studying quantitative chemistry. Clear explanations coupled with interesting and unusual illustrations help understanding. For example, the structure and function of xylem tissue in stems was made clearer by reference to scaffolding used in buildings to compensate for sway in high winds. Teachers adopt a range of strategies to support learning. The best teaching makes work demanding, yet interesting and relevant; it uses a good selection of activities, enjoyable experiments and interesting tasks. Fascinated by a simple demonstration of twisting movements of the upside down baking case, Year 8 pupils keenly set about their task of slowing down its speed while cheerfully discussing forces.
96. Very good teaching is characterised by lively lessons that are well planned and briskly paced. Lessons where teaching was satisfactory rather than good shared many features of good lessons; activities were skilfully and safely managed with help from the very good support given by technicians. Pupils were appropriately praised, encouraged to learn in a supportive atmosphere and teachers' expectations were shared with them. Weaknesses occur when plans focus too much on the organisation of the activity rather than on what pupils must learn. On these occasions, opportunities for pupils to explore their own ideas are constrained by a narrow range of teaching methods. Progress is slowed down when insufficient attention is given to the planning of activities that become progressively challenging. Lessons do not always begin in ways that capture pupils' imagination and not enough time is left at the end for thinking about what has been learnt.
97. The department strongly benefits from very good leadership. It is well managed and teachers feel valued and supported. There is a clear commitment to high standards which has a positive effect on progress and levels of attainment. Teachers work hard, using their skills and talents to good effect in supporting pupils. The department is beginning to evaluate its performance meticulously and assessment information has been well used to identify learning targets for almost all pupils. Regular classroom observations are not taking place, but monitoring of teaching and learning is beginning through detailed analysis of results. With the exception of computers and data-loggers, there is a good range of equipment and apparatus. Technical staff resources are low for the demands of the curriculum. Technicians make a strong contribution to the quality of science education and are highly valued. The curriculum is greatly enriched through many visits to places of scientific interest, for example Jodrell Bank, for further studies of astronomy and extensive fieldwork on Blencathra. There are strong links with local universities and, through the BAYS club, with the neighbouring preparatory school. Pupils are successful as young scientists and analysts in competitions organised by the Salters' Institute 'Festival of Chemistry'.

## **ART**

98. During the inspection, the timetable of the part-time teacher on maternity leave was covered by another part-time art teacher.
99. GCSE results for 1999 were much the same as the national average, a significant improvement from the results in 1998. The 2000 results show further improvement, and the work in the current Year 11 groups indicates that this is likely to continue.

100. A-level results in 1999 were similar to the national average. In 2000 the average points score improved significantly. Examination results have steadily improved over the last three years.
101. In the work seen, standards at Key Stage 3 are above those expected nationally. From Year 7, pupils show astute observation and skills in analysis. Year 8 pupils can analyse how and why the optical illusion elements are successful in paintings by Bridget Riley.
102. Standards in the work seen at Key Stage 4 are well above those expected. Year 11 pupils show fine motor skills and detailed work; a painstakingly detailed drawing did not detract from the impact of the piece as a whole. Pupils acquire a good range of skills working with colour, tone and texture in different media, for example, drawing and painting using oils and pastels, collage and architecturally based work. Three-dimensional work is a strength.
103. In the sixth form, well above average standards are maintained. Work on display from the sixth form exhibition in the library was vital and exciting.
104. The very small number of pupils with special needs make good progress. The work extends the ablest pupils appropriately. A small amount of computer-based work of high quality was seen in the sixth form but none was seen at Key Stages 3 and 4. Pupils discuss aesthetic concepts and artistic ideas, and in so doing extend their own linguistic development.
105. Extensive high quality display is used both to celebrate and inspire pupils' work.
106. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are excellent. They enjoy their work and show their enthusiasm. They show an openness when collaborating in group tasks. The pace of work demonstrates their commitment.
107. Teaching and learning are very good at Key Stages 3 and 4, and excellent in the sixth form. Staff show considerable subject expertise and very skilled teaching methods. Planning and preparation are thorough and linked to clear learning targets. Individual tutorial work at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is excellent. It helps pupils not only to know exactly how well they are doing, but to set themselves very sharply focused targets for improvement. The links between pupils' own work and the work of well-known artists are a strong feature, for example reference was made to Matisse, Riley and O'Keeffe at Key Stage 3 during the inspection week. There are high expectations and supportive evaluations from staff. Probing questioning helps pupils to develop skills of observation and analysis. A balance of intellectual learning through observation and understanding, practical learning through skills development, and artistic learning through making a piece of art, is achieved at all stages in the curriculum.
108. Leadership and management in art are of very high quality, and often inspirational. There is particular strength in assessment at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form where it is linked to the individual tutorial programme. While assessment procedures are generally good at Key Stage 3, pupils are not sufficiently helped to use the language of self-assessment. Development priorities have yet to be determined and linked with the school plan. An effective programme of visits to galleries extends the curriculum well. The newly refurbished accommodation is of very good quality, although work in ceramics cannot be undertaken until the kiln ventilation is operational. There is limited

use of ICT because of the lack of equipment in the department, although some good work using the central resources was seen at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The department makes a significant contribution to the school's excellence in spiritual, moral, social and cultural education.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

109. No GCSE examinations were taken in 1999 and 2000. It is not possible therefore to make a judgement about the trend in results.
110. At A-level in 1999, the results were at grades D and E. All students who entered the examination passed, and the average point score improved very significantly on the previous year. The numbers taking the fashion and fabric course were too small for sensible statistical comparison to be made with national figures.
111. Standards are above those expected in the work seen at Key Stage 3. Pupils understand the design process well, and, inspired by good teaching, they design and develop imaginative products such as fun bags and soft furnishings. When they design and make waistcoats, they select wisely from a range of materials, skilfully using a wide range of appropriate construction and decorative techniques. They can design and work in three dimensions, developing their own patterns. In food technology, pupils show a suitable understanding of nutrition. They undertake product analysis of existing products when, for example, designing their own chill-desserts. Pupils are developing an understanding of industrial processes through undertaking the batch production of bread. Over the three years of Key Stage 3 pupils achieve well in the materials areas offered. In Year 7 they work safely, can investigate products, and make simple changes to recipes. In Year 8 they make judgements based upon tasting and testing food products and can create soft furnishings for individual needs and cultural preferences. By Year 9, pupils can consider industrial processes and utilise a range of analytical methods, such as flow charts and 'star' diagrams, when designing an individual product. The 1999 teacher assessments in Year 9 show standards well above those reported nationally.

112. The work seen at Key Stage 4 meets the expected standard. Some work is finished to a high practical standard. Products are imaginatively conceived and varied, incorporating both practical and designing skills appropriately. The quality of teaching, in particular teachers' subject knowledge, has a positive effect on pupils' achievements. In textiles and food technology, pupils skilfully investigate existing products from a variety of sources, and establish user needs in order to suggest changes for different target groups. In food technology, they identify nutritional needs before designing their own products, linking their knowledge of product design with their knowledge of nutrition. In textiles, pupils investigate and apply a variety of construction techniques. Design work shows the competent use of a variety of graphic techniques including word processing, and an awareness of practical design constraints. However, there are few examples of prototypes or modelling being used to develop products. At Key Stage 4 pupils, including lower attainers, approach project work with interest and concentration, and make good progress. They are creative in their design and presentation when making products for a gift shop or cook-chill meals. Analytical and reasoning skills are used when pupils consider nutritional and dietary needs of users. Pupils apply their knowledge of the design process well, and make good use of their developing knowledge of health and safety issues.
113. In the sixth form, the work seen meets the expected standard. Students show confidence in using materials and techniques. Some of the work seen, for example, where students had made blouses, was of a 'near-professional' standard. Students understand the properties and constraints of the materials they work with, and use this knowledge to make modifications as their work progresses. Students' approach to their work is enhanced by their level of skill and self-motivation. They make decisions based upon design and manufacturing constraints, the properties of materials and the techniques to be utilised, even though the course followed by some pupils allows little opportunity for the design process to be used in full so that they can achieve well.
114. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. They are motivated and enthusiastic, and this has a positive impact upon the quality of their learning and the final product. They persevere. Pupils respond well to questioning, often indicating a willingness to address the social or moral implications of what they investigate or do. When investigating ingredients in commercial food products, one pupil commented that 'it really makes you realise that you don't want yourself or your family to eat this food and ingredients'. There are positive relationships between pupils and with staff across the department.
115. Teaching is good overall at Key Stages 3 and 4, on occasion, very good. In the sixth form, where pupils are asked probing questions and are encouraged to consider the consequences of their decisions in detail, teaching is very good. Teachers have good subject knowledge which supports pupils' learning very well. Lessons are well planned and structured. Teachers maintain a good working pace, inspiring pupils to think imaginatively about their designs and findings. Resources are used well to enhance teaching, particularly where product analysis leads to a deeper understanding of issues, and a better specification for pupils' own products. This was evident in pupils' investigation of a range of commercially available chill deserts. Appropriate technical vocabulary is used well, for example, where teachers explain the term 'to crimp' and discuss the significance of 'a glaze' when investigating pasties in Key Stage 3. Numeracy skills are developed in a variety of ways, for example when pupils investigate proportions of ingredients and fat content in foods. In some lessons



the work does not challenge all pupils sufficiently and this limits their learning. Recently acquired resources, such as an automated embroidery machine, a variety of media including a large number of books for food and textiles and software providing nutritional information, are being used effectively to support learning.

116. There is a good policy for marking, which is supported by end of unit evaluation sheets containing pupils' evaluation of their own attainment and progress and some target setting. At Key Stage 3, the marking does not always include evaluative comments or advice on making improvements, or targets for doing so. The department does not share with pupils the assessment criteria related to National Curriculum levels. Pupils have insufficient knowledge therefore about how well they are getting on.
117. The department has undergone a period of rapid development while introducing National Curriculum design and technology. It has met the challenging demands of the department development plan. The hard work of the subject manager and teaching staff is to be commended. There is a new Key Stage 3 scheme of work for food and textiles, and ICT is integrated into the curriculum. Staff and pupils now have a sound understanding of the design, make and evaluate process. However, requirements for the provision of resistant materials in the Key Stage 3 curriculum are not met, and provision for the systems and control elements of the curriculum is largely absent or under-developed. There is currently no provision at Key Stage 3 for control technology or for mechanical, pneumatic and electronic control systems, although an embroidery CAD/CAM facility exists in textiles. The resulting curriculum and option choices within the subject are therefore limited. The lack of technician support in this practical area is having a negative effect on the quality of learning opportunities because teachers are having to spend time preparing equipment and resources, including food ingredients. There is no formal co-ordination of health and safety policy or of the recording of annual safety checks and risk assessment across the department. Industrial links to help develop pupils' understanding of industrial processes are not established.
118. From January 2001, the school's development of design and technology will be supported by the appointment of a permanent head of department and the refurbishment of existing accommodation.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

119. Standards in the GCSE examination in 1999 were very high compared with the national average in all maintained schools. Results were slightly lower than those for girls in selective schools. There was a 100 per cent pass rate and a high proportion of pupils achieved the highest grades. Results have been maintained consistently at this level during recent years.
120. In 1999, standards at A-level were very high compared with the average in all maintained schools, and much the same as those achieved by girls in similar schools. The school has maintained a 100 per cent pass rate in recent years and the proportion of pupils achieving the highest grades has been steadily improving. The improvement in 2000 was significant.
121. The 1999 teacher assessments in Year 9 were very high in comparison with those reported for all maintained schools nationally. In 2000 the proportion of pupils reaching level 6 or higher rose, although the proportion reaching Levels 7 and 8 showed a fall.

122. In the work seen, standards are very high at Key Stage 3. Pupils have a very good knowledge of a number of places, including their local area, the rest of the United Kingdom, and countries such as Italy and Japan. They consider tourism as an example of a tertiary industry and are able to identify its advantages and disadvantages for settlements at home and abroad where it is a significant factor. Pupils have a well-developed geographical vocabulary and can create and analyse a wide variety of map types, such as ordnance survey, sketch and choropleth maps.
123. Overall standards are high at Key Stage 4, while a high proportion of pupils in Year 11 are progressing well towards raising standards further. Pupils understand concepts such as an ecosystem well and can identify a variety of these in the world, for example, showing a good awareness of the characteristics of rainforests. Natural processes such as erosion are well understood and explained, with tables and charts used well to support the text.
124. High standards overall are maintained in the sixth form, where a high proportion of students in Year 13 are progressing well towards improving these further. Year 13 students analyse advantages and disadvantages of life in cold environments and can identify changes in the life of the Inuit people. The standard of individual investigations is very high, with considerable variety in focuses chosen, good posing of geographical questions, appropriate investigative techniques, clear and well-written presentation of findings and objective evaluation of the outcomes of the investigation.
125. Pupils' attitudes to their work are very good and their behaviour is excellent. They work diligently. In many lessons however, they do so very quietly, with limited sharing of tasks and ideas. By contrast, some lessons, especially in the lower years, are characterised by an air of busy collaboration, with pupils enthusiastically sharing and discussing ideas in pairs and threesomes. When encouraged to do so, pupils respond to questioning in thoughtful, open-ended responses and are willing to discuss geographical issues. They are generally willing to seek help when work is not fully understood, taking a responsible approach when problems arise in their work. For example, in an ICT-based lesson in Year 7, when some girls encountered difficulties accessing the Internet, most persevered well in seeking solutions.
126. Teaching is good overall: very good at Key Stage 3, good at Key Stage 4 and satisfactory in the sixth form. Planning is good, ensuring good integration of knowledge, skills and understanding. For example, in Year 10, when learning about the characteristics of different kinds of settlement, pupils also had full opportunity to apply and consolidate their mapping skills while choosing sites on a contour map. The strong subject knowledge of teachers often makes a positive contribution to learning, as in a Year 11 lesson when the teacher provided a valuable extra perspective for analysing data about the characteristics of rainforests. There is good continuity between lessons because teachers make good links with previous and subsequent work so that pupils are clear about the relevance of what they are doing and how it is developing. Homework supports this well, generally having clear relevance to the work in the lessons in which it is set. It is followed up well in succeeding lessons. In most lessons, teachers are enthusiastic and stimulating. They have a good awareness of the individual needs of their pupils and support them sympathetically and with much encouragement. Geography supports the development of literacy skills well, for example, by focusing on the development and use of specialist vocabulary and providing opportunities for extended writing. A Year 7 task, for example, required pupils to write persuasively about the attractions of local places. Numeracy skills are addressed appropriately, with pupils having many

opportunities to compile and analyse statistical data in tables and graphs. In a Year 12 lesson, useful practice in calculating relative population densities of various countries was complemented well by a highly appropriate level of analysis. In this, students considered the extent to which apparently uniform figures related to the actual distribution of population in countries such as Brazil and Australia.

127. There are, however, occasional weaknesses in teaching. In some lessons, there is insufficient monitoring and support of individual work, and teachers sometimes fail to make use of the knowledge and understanding of their pupils. On occasion, teachers provide too much information and too many ideas, reducing the opportunity for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and undermining the challenge of the work. During the inspection this was particularly prevalent in some sixth form lessons.
128. The leadership and management of the subject are very good, having a particularly positive effect upon the way in which it is presented. There is a clear vision of the way in which the role of geography should develop in the school. The department has taken full advantage of having its own base to present geography as participatory, living and enjoyable, with stimulating, attractive, frequently updated displays celebrating the subject and pupils' achievements in it.

## **HISTORY**

129. In 1999 GCSE results were above the national average and much the same as those for girls in selective schools. The results in 2000 were similar to those of the previous year. One feature of GCSE results in the past three years is the high proportion of A\* and A grades.
130. The results in 1999 at A-level were similar both to the national average and to the average for girls in selective schools. In 2000, the results showed a significant rise including a marked increase in grades A - B compared with the previous two years.
131. In 1999, teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 were well above the average reported nationally. In 2000, they were similar to those for the previous year.
132. In the work seen at Key Stage 3 standards are above those expected. Pupils in Year 9 produce different forms of writing including imaginative diary entries about life in a village affected by plague, giving the prosecution and defence case in a study of Guy Fawkes, and explaining why William won the battle of Hastings. They select information from sources when examining the different claims to the throne in 1066; they learn to combine information from sources when considering Harold's options for defending himself against his rivals. They draw conclusions from sources when studying portraits of Henry VII and Henry VIII. In a study of changes in Britain, pupils sort and classify information into social, economic and political categories. In a study of Henry VII they sort and classify information about how Henry dealt with opposition from the nobility.
133. In the work seen at Key Stage 4 above average standards are maintained. Pupils continue to produce different forms of writing. For example, they argue for and against appeasement, analyse Hitler's foreign policy and explain why the Nazis came to power. They distinguish between long- and short-term causes in their study of World War One and they explain how the alliance system contributed towards war. In their study of immigration in America, they identify issues such as racism and elitism through studying sources. They analyse and assess the options facing President Kennedy at the time of the Cuban missile crisis and make links by giving examples of

brinkmanship from other periods in history. They select and take notes on relevant information from different sources in preparation for writing a newspaper report on the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand.

134. In the work seen in the sixth form, standards are above those expected with students at the start of the AS-level course showing the potential to achieve above average standards. Students' essays are clearly structured. They demonstrate good research skills in essay preparation and other lesson activities. In their study of Tsarist Russia, pupils think critically and show an understanding of the limitations of labels such as 'peasant' while appreciating the historian's need to use such labels. They identify the limitations of sources when drawing conclusions about levels of poverty in Russian society. Students select and combine information from different source materials to build up their understanding of the renaissance as a time of change and identify the range of changes which occurred. In their study of British foreign policy in the nineteenth century, they identify Britain's needs as an island from looking at a variety of sources.
135. The development of key skills is apparent at each key stage and in the sixth form. These skills build cumulatively so that pupils learn effectively and make very good progress. At Key Stage 3, the development of extended writing skills is a notable feature of progress; pupils are taught to classify and structure their ideas so that writing skills can be progressively developed over the key stage. This provides a firm foundation for GCSE and A-level examination requirements. Pupils are encouraged to look critically at historical sources during Key Stage 3 and they show increasing confidence in the critical evaluation of sources during Key Stage 4. In the sixth form, students make good gains in research skills which have been nurtured during earlier stages. They make very good progress in communicating their ideas in essay and course work.
136. Pupils' attitudes to the subject are very good, with many examples of excellence. In group and paired activities pupils listen carefully to each other's contributions. They show initiative in taking notes during discussion work. Pupils sustain their concentration very well when working on individual tasks, including research and investigation. During whole class discussion pupils give considered responses, showing that they are thinking carefully about their own and others' contributions.
137. Teaching is very good overall. Some is excellent at both key stages and in the sixth form. There are many strengths and a number of aspects of the teaching considerably enhance pupils' learning. In the introduction of new topics at GCSE and A-level, subject expertise and careful planning establish a very clear framework for lesson activities so that pupils have a clear overview of new work. Good subject knowledge is a key factor in discussion work in the sixth form, particularly in the challenging questions that encourage critical thinking. At all stages, pupils' work rate is enhanced by the careful selection of resources that are both challenging and accessible. This enables individuals and groups to begin quickly and sustain their concentration. Teachers' methods are very effective in ensuring that younger pupils are challenged with activities that involve sorting and classifying information. This lays a firm foundation from which pupils can develop skills in structuring their ideas in extended writing. At all levels pupils are challenged to look critically at information, laying a firm foundation for examination requirements.
138. Marking is done thoroughly with clear indications of what pupils need to do to improve. Homework effectively extends pupils' learning. Time is very well used in the majority of lessons although sometimes introductions are too long, leaving insufficient time for

pupils to complete lesson tasks. In the majority of lessons where group work is involved, the activities are very productive and usefully enhance learning. On a small number of occasions, the work undertaken by some groups falls below the high standards achieved by the majority. The use of groups and individuals to undertake research in lessons and then report back to the whole class is a very effective means of helping pupils to gain an overview of a topic. On occasion, however, this reporting back is not well managed in terms of the time allowed and the quality of presentation expected.

139. Leadership and management in the subject are excellent. The department is strongly committed to raising achievement through its planning. It makes full use of what pupils' assessments indicate about the effectiveness of planning in order to make adjustments and improvements. There are very good procedures for monitoring pupils' performance.

### **INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

140. All pupils take a short GCSE course in information technology. The results in 1999 were close to the national average for girls in all maintained schools. In 2000 they show a rise. The subject was not examined at GCSE in 1998. The 1999 results at grades A\*-C were slightly above the national average for girls in selective schools.
141. In 1999, teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 indicate standards to be above the average reported nationally. Standards are maintained in 2000.
142. In the work seen, standards in Year 9 are above those expected nationally. In the taught ICT course, the majority of pupils can access the software quickly and easily with teacher direction and they become competent at using it. A small number are slower initially due to the necessity to share computers, but these pupils catch up over the key stage. Pupils are fluent in basic operations such as using a keyboard and mouse. Throughout the key stage, they confidently word process and edit their work, enhancing it with clip art. Pupils' files include work on spreadsheets, for example, using simple formulae to produce estimates of zoo animals' food costs, and basic databases, set up and edited, that contain details of a swimming club membership. Higher attainers progress more quickly through the work and use the technical language. Year 9 pupils engage competently with the software package to design and produce an information booklet for foreign students. They carry out searches on the Internet for coursework investigation, for example when researching a science topic.
143. At Key Stage 4 all pupils are taught ICT through the GCSE short course; every pupil undertakes the examination. In the work seen in this specialist examination course, pupils plan in detail how they will carry out a given coursework task. Work is well drafted and revised using a combination of computer and literacy skills. Coursework files show that higher attainers, in particular, approach their work with considerable thoroughness and show good understanding of technical language. These pupils are skilled in setting up spreadsheets for use as a company accounts system, entering the formula and understanding how this will be used. Extensive ICT skills of a high standard are shown in the development of the examination tasks. For example, pupils set up a database using a number of fields relating to the production of identity badges. They can manipulate this full version of a commercial database. Using individual interpretation and suitable software, pupils design different logos for cinema advertising and complicated menu displays for restaurant use. They apply ICT skills

to new situations as required by the coursework criteria. Pupils acquire new knowledge speedily and make very good progress over this key stage.

144. In addition to being taught how to use computers, pupils are required to develop the use of ICT skills within the subjects of the curriculum. This use is at a very early stage of development. Some subjects make some use. A fair proportion of teachers have ICT skills and work encouragingly with pupils where possible. For example, in religious education, pupils research the activities of the Early Church successfully using subject specific software. In Year 9 textile lessons, pupils use CAD/CAM facilities to produce a design to make on an electronically controlled embroidery machine. Desk-top publishing is used creatively in history to produce newspaper front pages on topical issues. Coursework in English and geography is enhanced by good ICT skills. In science, pupils in Years 9 and 10 use data logging to look at effects of varying light intensity on the rate of photosynthesis. In mathematics, geometry software is used competently by Year 9 pupils to collect accurate data on equations. The cross-curricular use of ICT, however, is unsatisfactory overall and statutory requirements are not met in this regard. For a number of subject areas adequate access to computers is a problem. This applies to English, mathematics, art, modern languages and music.
145. The quality of teaching in timetabled ICT lessons is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge that enables them to give clear explanations to pupils. Lessons are very well structured with a suitable balance of time both for instruction and for pupils to work independently. The support given to individuals by teachers and technicians ensures the development of confidence and skills. Good interaction by the teacher in a Year 8 lesson helped pupils to revise the use of the word processing software and insert clipart successfully to quickly produce quality work. Class management is good and ensures that effective learning takes place despite the fact that classes are large and pupils have to share computers. Useful staff training has been provided and more is helpfully planned for the near future. The day-to-day assessing of pupils' achievements and progress is an area for development. There is little evidence of the monitoring of pupils' work in ICT across the curriculum.
146. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. Pupils co-operate very well, even when they have to share a computer. They openly enjoy the good teaching they receive and all are comfortable with the atmosphere in class.
147. The leadership of ICT within the specialist programme is good. However, whole school cross-curricular management of the subject is not satisfactory. Resources for the control aspect of the subject are inadequate to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. The deficiencies in subject provision are recognised by the school. There have been considerable improvements in the curriculum over the last three years; the plans in hand for further developments are very well thought out.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

148. The school's first modern foreign language is French, which is studied by all pupils at Key Stages 3 and 4. Additionally, from Year 8, all pupils take Latin or Spanish; they may or may not accept the school's advice as to which one they study. In Year 10, all pupils follow a GCSE course in French; some also take Spanish and/or German which is begun by a small group of pupils in Year 10.
149. GCSE results in French have been extremely good over the last three years. In 1999 the average points score was very high compared with the national average for girls in

all schools and slightly above the average for girls in selective schools. Very few pupils obtain lower than a grade A\* to C, and the proportion achieving the highest grades is significantly higher than the results for girls in selective schools. Almost all pupils achieve a grade A\*-C and the proportion achieving this standard is significantly higher than the proportion achieved by girls in selective schools. The results in 2000 were similar.

150. In Spanish, the 1999 results were close to the national average for girls in all maintained schools and reflects the ability profile of the pupils who take up Spanish in Year 8. However, the proportion of pupils obtaining grades A\* to C has been higher than that of girls in selective schools. In 2000 the results show a fall to well below the 1999 average for girls in all schools nationally. Relatively small numbers take German but, over the three years 1997 to 1999, all pupils have obtained A\* to C grades, three quarters of them gaining A\* and A. In 2000 the points score improved further.
151. At A-level in 1999 the results in French were above the national average for girls in all maintained schools, while the proportion of students passing French was very high. The results were much the same as those for girls in selective schools. In 2000, the results were not so good and the average points score was only 5.0, below the 1999 average for all schools. The numbers taking German have been small but all have passed over the last three years, the majority with A grades. In Spanish, the results have declined since 1998 and in 2000 they were poor: fewer than half the pupils passed, well below the proportion for girls in all maintained schools.
152. Performance in the 1999 teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 was very high. All but a few pupils reached the nationally expected Level 4 and a significant number reached Levels 7 and 8.
153. In the work seen at Key Stages 3 and 4, standards in German and French were well above those expected nationally. In the sixth form, they were high in German and at the expected standard in French. In Spanish, standards were at the expected level at each stage. The small number of pupils with special needs are clearly identified and make good progress over Key Stage 3, but gifted pupils are not identified and are therefore not given appropriately challenging work.
154. At Key Stage 3, the language of communication in the classroom is the language being taught and pupils are expected to respond to it. As a result, listening skills are highly developed. Pupils also have an opportunity to hear native speakers on tape. Even in difficult listening exercises, pupils are able to extract considerable detail. Speaking skills are good: most pupils have good accents and pronunciation and they respond readily in lessons. Relatively little attention is given to reading but pupils have a very good understanding of the short texts that they encounter. From the outset, there is considerable emphasis on writing. Pupils have a very good grasp of the grammar of the language being studied, and by the end of the key stage they write accurately and with some originality, using a variety of tenses and structures.
155. The standard of listening skills remains high at Key Stage 4. Pupils cope with increasingly complex language from a range of sources. Their pronunciation and intonation continue to be good, but they are less willing to speak and keep their utterances to a minimum. As a result, they do not develop the ability to speak at any length. A contributory factor may be that they were seen at the beginning of the school year and that for the most part the teacher and the class were meeting for the first or second time. Written work is generally very good. Pupils write confidently and

at length in a variety of forms, formal and personal letters, dialogues and accounts. Work is usually accurate and much of it is of a very high standard. Writing in French and German is usually better than in Spanish where pupils write less and with less variety of structure.

156. Except in German, where students can give extended answers using a variety of structures, speaking skills in the sixth form are still limited. Students' understanding of their reading texts is satisfactory but they find the extent and difficulty of the required reading a big jump from Key Stage 4. There is a good range of written work; the quality in German is good, often very good, and in French and Spanish it is satisfactory.
157. Pupils' behaviour is exemplary; they are interested and always conscientious. When working in pairs they co-operate well and get on with the task in hand. They take care over the presentation of their written work. However, although their oral work is good, some pupils lack confidence and are reluctant to volunteer.
158. The standard of teaching observed was satisfactory overall, and in a third of lessons was good or very good. It was strongest in German and at Key Stage 4. Teachers use the target language, French, German or Spanish as the means of all communication in the classroom and consequently pupils' listening and basic oral skills are good. Insufficient attention, however, is given to the development of more advanced speaking skills and as a result pupils, though fluent, are less good at making extended utterances. A strong feature is the teaching of grammatical structures and writing skills, with the result that pupils write accurately in a wide range of structures and idiom. Although lesson planning is detailed, learning targets are not always made clear to the pupils and progress towards achieving them is not always checked at the end of the lesson. Teachers use a variety of methods, but do not always make enough use of visual resources. This is because teaching is not in specialist rooms and so staff have to carry materials with them to each lesson. Pupils' work is marked regularly and teachers insist that corrections are done. Assessment is related to GCSE and A-level criteria, so that pupils know where they stand in relation to external examination objectives. However, across the key stages and the sixth form, not enough use is made of pupils' assessments to track their progress, to set targets for pupils' learning, and to check whether any modifications to curriculum planning are necessary.
159. The time allocation for the first foreign language has been reduced and is now significantly below that recommended. The curriculum is enriched by visits and exchanges to France, Germany and Spain, and by work experience in France. Little use is made of ICT.
160. The management of the modern languages department is efficient but delegation is hampered by the fact that two senior members of the department have other school responsibilities. Pupils' books are checked regularly and teachers observe each other in the classroom for the sharing of good practice. Examination results are analysed and this has led, for example, to the establishment of an action plan for Spanish. The lack of a group of specialist room results in the seven full-time equivalent staff teaching in thirty different rooms during the course of the week. This is quite unsatisfactory and has a deleterious effect on the work of the department and the quality of education received by the pupils.

## **MUSIC**



161. The number taking music at GCSE is too small to make valid statistical comparisons with national figures. All those entering in 1999 achieved grades A\*, A or B, as was achieved in 1998. This quality was maintained in 2000.
162. At A-level in 1999 the small number entering achieved good results. Results were higher in 2000.
163. In the work seen at Key Stage 3 standards are above those expected nationally. Pupils show good knowledge of the elements of music. They work with staff notation confidently when performing and composing. Singing skills are good throughout the key stage. Pupils listen attentively to a range of musical styles from a range of cultural traditions. They use keyboards confidently and record their work on audio-tape efficiently.
164. At Key Stage 4, the work seen shows standards above those expected. Pupils' coursework at this early stage of the school year reflects the good foundations laid in previous years. Pupils show an easy familiarity with the technical vocabulary. Three-part calypso performance was secure in spite of quite difficult rhythms and this led spontaneously into enjoyable four-part singing. The use of ICT is under-developed because of the lack of computer provision. Students taking A-level are working at a standard above that expected.
165. Pupils are extremely well behaved. They show eager anticipation of lessons, enjoyment, a high degree of self-discipline, and sustained concentration whether working in class, group or individual situations. Relationships are excellent.
166. Teaching is very good. Teachers' good musicianship skills are used very effectively to support learning. Teachers employ a range of methods in a friendly but firm manner, with humour threading its way through lessons. Every minute of the lesson is used to the full, with the momentum created at the beginning being sustained throughout. Helpful worksheets guide pupils' work. Staff have taken advantage of the suited accommodation to provide a stimulating learning environment.
167. Leadership and management in the subject are excellent. Although there have been staffing difficulties for almost a year due to the unavoidable absence of one of the full-time staff, these are not being allowed to affect either the range or quality of music provision. Twenty per cent of pupils benefit from instrumental tuition on a wide range of instruments except, surprisingly, brass. To have an inspection beginning on the third day of the school year while preparing for music's high profile contribution to the school's speech day in the second full week highlighted the determination, musical expertise and hard work of the music staff. Three groups were heard rehearsing in preparation. A packed Bridgewater Hall listened intently to a varied programme of music in contrasting styles which included both solo performance and performances by a close harmony choir, junior and senior choirs, by the orchestra and the swing orchestra. Parents are very appreciative of the wide range of music-making opportunities. The school is justly proud of its musical achievements.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

168. There are no examination courses in physical education at 16 and 18. The 1999 teacher assessments for pupils aged 14 were above the average reported nationally, with the great majority of pupils attaining the national standard.

169. In the work seen at the end of Key Stage 3 pupils attain standards above those expected for their age-group. Standards in games are good, pupils play with confidence and demonstrate a range of skills that enable the games to proceed at a good pace. They have a good knowledge of the rules and work well together in teams to outwit their opponents. In hockey Year 9 pupils demonstrated a wide range of skills and an understanding of attacking and defensive roles; they played a lively competitive game to a good standard. Standards in dance and gymnastics are average for two reasons. Many pupils enter the school with a limited experience in these activities and in recent years the balance of the curriculum has favoured games. In all physical activities pupils observe carefully the demonstrations by the teacher and by other pupils and so have a very clear picture of the physical skills to be learnt. They use this knowledge when working with others to help them improve. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. Pupils are keen to learn and do well in lessons. In this very good learning atmosphere teachers can concentrate on teaching the required skills so that pupils entering the school with average standards in physical education are able to achieve standards above average in many aspects of the work. This is good achievement for pupils of all abilities.
170. The standards achieved at the end of Key Stage 4 in games and athletic activities are consistently above those expected nationally. Pupils of all abilities make very good progress as they build up their skills, knowledge and understanding of physical activities. They are enthusiastic participants and develop more advanced skills and tactics in their games. For example in netball in Year 11 pupils planned how to 'block' an opponent and then work on tactics to counter this. They are confident when working together to coach and to improve their skills and when officiating in a game.
171. Students maintain their enthusiasm for physical activity in the sixth form, encouraged by the new recreational courses offered. They make effective progress in these activities and attain satisfactory standards. The more able pupils in the sixth form continue to play in school and district teams and many attain very good standards of performance. As pupils move through the school they develop a very good understanding of how to prepare for activity and do this conscientiously at the start of lessons. Older pupils have a good understanding of the effects of exercise on the body and the contribution of exercise to a healthy lifestyle.
172. Teaching is good overall. The quality is best at Key Stage 4 where a greater proportion of very good teaching was seen. Many lessons were the first this term so that pupils were returning to winter activities after a gap of several months. Teachers planned well for this situation with activities that revisited previous work, without too much repetition, and then moved quickly to new work. In a Year 10 netball lesson the teacher used her very good subject knowledge and observation of pupils to move quickly from basic footwork skills to working on passing on the move. In this lesson the teacher had a very good knowledge of the level of ability of individual pupils and set tasks to suit their stage of development. Pupils react very well to the brisk pace set in many lessons; they concentrate when the teacher is demonstrating new skills and readily practise and repeat activities in order to improve their performance. Teachers use a wide variety of methods to introduce work and sustain pupils' interest; they have high expectations for pupils' involvement in their own learning. This involvement does not extend to setting out for the pupils what is to be covered in any particular unit and in individual lessons. As a result, pupils can say what they are working on at any particular time in a lesson but cannot evaluate how well they are achieving the targets set for the whole lesson or for the unit of work. Teachers support pupils well with positive comments; however, these are usually to the whole class and do not always give sufficient indication to individuals on what they should

specifically work on in order to improve. Physical education makes an effective contribution to pupils' skills of speaking and listening through regular use of questioning in lessons. The use of computers in physical education is at an early stage of development with some opportunities for working on recording information in athletics and extra curricular activities, particularly at Key Stage 3. The use of video recording to aid the learning of skills is restricted by the limited access to suitable equipment.

173. Leadership and management of the department are very good. A significant feature is the shared aim of staff and pupils to succeed and achieve high standards. These two factors contribute to the high standards achieved. The quality of teaching is not monitored to ensure that the very good practice evident in some lessons is shared across the department. The curriculum has a strong emphasis on games and the department is rightly monitoring the balance of the curriculum to judge the effect of reduced time this year, particularly at Key Stage 3. The very good programme of extra-curricular activities is well supported by both staff and pupils and provides very good routes for more able pupils to take part in sport at a high level. Accommodation is adequate for the curriculum taught, but the use of the multi-purpose hall as a teaching space does result in loss of lesson time.