

# INSPECTION REPORT

**HILLCREST SCHOOL AND SIXTH FORM  
CENTRE**

Bartley Green, Birmingham

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103482

Headteacher: Mrs. Mary Campbell

Reporting inspector: Ross Maden  
2793

Dates of inspection: 20<sup>th</sup> – 24<sup>th</sup> November 2000

Inspection number: 223916

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## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 to 18

Gender of pupils: Female

School address: Stonehouse Lane  
Bartley Green  
Birmingham

Postcode: B32 3AE

Telephone number: 0121 427 3172

Fax number: 0121 428 1075

Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: David McCann

Date of previous inspection: 1<sup>st</sup> May 1995

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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			The school's results and pupils' achievements
			Teaching and learning
			Leadership and management
			Key Issues for action
Janet Harrison 11077	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
			Pupils' welfare, health and safety
			Partnership with parents and carers
Martin Ash 4749	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
Ann Axon 22411	Team inspector	Mathematics	
David Burbidge 22531	Team inspector	Science	
		Equality of opportunity	
Monica Christian 4689	Team inspector	Design and technology	
Harold Davies 13734	Team inspector	Geography	
		Provision for students in the sixth form	
Lawrence Denholm 17015	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
Janet Flisher 19414	Team inspector	English	
George Harris 10167	Team inspector	Religious education	
Don Innes 3943	Team inspector	Physical education	
		Provision for pupils with special educational needs	
Mike Johnson 30518	Team inspector	Art and design	
Peter Tidmarsh 18670	Team inspector	Music	
Vernon Williams 20497	Team inspector	History	Quality and range of opportunities for learning

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Hillcrest School and Sixth Form Centre is a community comprehensive school educating girls between the ages of 11 and 16 and boys and girls in the sixth form. There are 1040 pupils on roll, including 155 students in the sixth form. There is considerable movement of pupils who enter and leave the school during the year. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is 311 which is above the national average. 101 pupils have English as an additional language, however few of these pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The school is popular with parents and an increasing proportion of pupils is coming from outside the local area. There are 147 pupils on the special needs register and six of them have statements. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is close to the national average. Pupils' attainment on entry is below the national average. The percentage of pupils from ethnic minority families is well above the national average. The school is located in the Bartley Green ward where the proportion of adults with higher education and the percentage of children living in high social class backgrounds is well below the national average.

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

Hillcrest School and Sixth Form Centre is a very effective school whose strengths outweigh its weaknesses. The school achieves high standards in German, geography, performing arts, design and technology and vocational courses. Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are good. The quality of teaching is consistently good across all subjects. The school has very good leadership and clear strategies for raising achievement. The school provides good value for money and the cost effectiveness of the sixth form is satisfactory.

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

- There is a consistency of good quality teaching throughout most of the school.
- High standards are achieved in German, geography, performing arts, design and technology and on vocational courses.
- The very good quality of monitoring teaching and pupils' progress leads to challenging targets for improvement.
- The range of extra-curricular activities, including the enhancement programme in the sixth form, is very good.
- The school has very good leadership. The headteacher and senior management team are well supported by good quality middle management.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is very good and the relationships between pupils from different cultures are a particular strength.
- Pupils have high levels of confidence and self-esteem.

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

- The level of resources and co-ordination of information and communication technology.
- The time allocated to religious education at Key Stage 4 is too low.
- The criteria for students entering 'A level' courses is a weakness leading to well below average success at 'A level'.
- The programme for personal and social education lacks coherence across the year groups.
- Delegation to middle management of some responsibilities for pastoral care undertaken by senior management.

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

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

There has been an improvement in standards since the previous inspection in May 1995. Standards at the age of 14 are broadly the same as they were at that time. There has, however, been an improvement in GCSE results and the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A\* to C has risen from 43 per cent in 1994 to 50 per cent in 2000, broadly matching the national trend. The average points score in 'A level' examinations rose steadily from 1993 to 1996 but fell for the next three years before improving in 2000. In tackling the key issues identified in the previous report the governors have made good progress on most issues. Marking which was a weakness is now a strength. There have been some major improvements in the accommodation especially for science and design and technology. Attendance rates have improved. However the requirements for religious education at Key Stage 4 are still not met. The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection.

## STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	D	D	C	A
A-levels/AS-levels	E	E	D	

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

Pupils' overall attainment in the 1999 National Curriculum tests for 14 year olds was broadly in line with the national average and was well above in comparison with schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds. Attainment in English was above the national average well above the average for similar schools but only in line with the standards achieved by girls nationally. Attainment in mathematics was well below the national average; the comparison with similar schools showed below average attainment in mathematics. Attainment in science was below the national but above average attainment in comparison with similar schools. The results in these tests improved between 1996 and 1999, matching the national trend. The results in the National Curriculum tests for 2000 showed a significant increase in attainment in mathematics.

In the GCSE examinations in 1999, the average points score which pupils gained was below the national average but above average in comparison with schools taking pupils from a similar background. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A\* - C was close to the national average and well above average in comparison with similar schools. However, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A\*- G was well below the national average and below in comparison with similar schools. In 1999 pupils gained better results in science, design and technology, geography, German and French, than they did on average in all their subjects combined. Their results in English language, mathematics, art, drama and business studies were below that average. The trend in the school's average GCSE points score was below the national trend between 1994 and 1999. In 2000 there was a significant



increase in the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A\* - G, bringing the proportion close to the 1999 national average.

Students' attainment in 'A-level' examinations in 1999 was below the national average for students following such courses. Results declined over the four years 1996 - 1999 but rose slightly in 2000. In 1999 students in most subjects gained a grade A to E. There were few high grades in individual subjects but, in German, psychology and general studies, over a third of the students gained grades A and B. In 2000 there was a slight improvement in 'A level' results and students' average points score rose slightly. Over a third of students gained grades A - B in mathematics, physics and French. In science subjects a significant number of students failed to gain a pass grade.

In the vocational courses in the sixth form, 16 students following these courses in 1999 were successful in all the subjects they studied. This had increased to 62 in 2000. Many students following these courses gained merit grades and there were several distinctions in both advanced and intermediate business and leisure and tourism.

Pupils enter the school with attainment that is below the national pattern. At the age of 14, pupils achieve better standards than might be expected, in relation to their earlier attainment in all subjects and therefore pupils' achievement is good. The standards of work seen during the inspection broadly match the levels expected nationally at the age of 14. Attainment at this age is average in English, mathematics and science. Standards at this stage are above average in art and geography. They are average in all other subjects. At the age of 16 standards of work seen during the inspection match those expected nationally and reflect the standards indicated by the 2000 GCSE results, which again indicates good achievement. Attainment is above average in art and design, design and technology, geography, history, modern foreign languages and physical education. In all other subjects standards are in line with those expected nationally, except religious education, where it is below average, because of the shortage of teaching time. Attainment in the sixth form was in line with that indicated by the 2000 'A level' results but nevertheless below average for such courses nationally. However, in relation to their prior levels of attainment at GCSE, students are making at least satisfactory and often good progress in their 'A-level' courses

The school set appropriate targets for pupils in GCSE examinations in 2000 and 2001. In 1999 the school slightly exceeded its target for the average points score and just failed to meet its target for all pupils to gain at least one grade A\* to G. However, the school exceeded its target for the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A\* to C.

## **PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES**

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Attitudes to the school	Most pupils have positive attitudes to school and show an interest in their learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	The behaviour of most pupils is good both in classrooms and around the school. A minority of pupils offer some challenging behaviour which is well managed by the school.
Personal development and	Pupils' personal development is good with many pupils taking an active

relationships	involvement in the life of the school. Relationships are good
Attendance	Attendance is satisfactory. Significant improvements in attendance have been made recently.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is good and has improved since the last inspection. This time, 99 per cent of lessons were at least satisfactory. Of the 194 lessons observed 1.5 per cent were judged to be excellent, 28.5 per cent very good, 51.5 per cent good, 18 per cent satisfactory and only one lesson was judged unsatisfactory. In the previous inspection only well over half of lessons were judged good or better.

The good teaching is having a clear impact on the quality of learning throughout the school; pupils are making good progress. There is some variation in the quality of teaching between subjects and year groups. The quality of teaching is consistently good across all subjects at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. At Key Stage 3 the quality of teaching is very good in design and technology, good in all other subjects except for English where it is satisfactory. The good quality of teaching leads to pupils acquiring good levels of knowledge and understanding and effective development of skills.

Teaching of literacy is good. Most pupils achieve good reading skills. Writing skills are sound and many pupils reach good levels of accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Levels of numeracy across the curriculum are above the standard expected. There is a whole-school strategy in place for improving standards by developing and co-ordinating numeracy across the whole school and the overall effectiveness for teaching numeracy is very good.

The needs of the most able and talented pupils are supported well in some subjects, such as dance, physical education, mathematics, drama and music, where they are encouraged to develop their talents and excel. However, their needs are not always being met in other subjects. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good and helps to ensure that these pupils make good progress in lessons. Teachers have a good awareness of which pupils are on the special education needs register. The teaching of pupils at the early stages of language development in English is good.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school provides a broad and balanced curriculum for pupils. The extra-curricular provision, including the sixth form enhancement programme is very good. The programme for personal, health, social and moral education is unsatisfactory. Religious education does not meet requirements at Key Stage 4.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	There is good provision for pupils with special educational needs but there are some weaknesses in the quality of individual education plans. In some subjects there is good provision for those pupils who are talented and gifted.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	A specialist provides good individual teaching for pupils at an early stage of language development.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Overall provision for pupils' personal development is very good. However there are weaknesses in the programme for personal, health, social and moral education. There are many opportunities for pupils to take responsibility. Pupils' moral, social and cultural development is very good. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The procedures for child protection and for ensuring pupils' welfare are good. The procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are very good. Parents have positive views of the school and the partnership with parents is satisfactory.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The quality of leadership and management is very good. The headteacher provides a clear vision for future developments within the school. In this task she is well supported by her senior management team and by those with management responsibilities for pastoral and curriculum. More day-to-day responsibilities should be delegated from senior management to middle management.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors undertake their responsibilities seriously and with dedication. They are failing to meet the needs of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education at Key Stage 4 and are failing to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The monitoring of teaching and the evaluation of standards in the school are particular strengths both at departmental and whole school levels.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are effectively used to support the priorities of the school. However the number of computers is not sufficient to meet the demands from teachers to use computers to support learning. The quality and quantity of books in the open learning centre is limited. The school is rigorous in applying the principles of best value.

## 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>• The school has high expectations for pupils.</li> <li>• Pupils are making good progress.</li> <li>• Their children like school.</li> <li>• Parents feel comfortable about approaching the school if there are problems.</li> <li>• The quality of teaching is good.</li> <li>• The school is well led and managed</li> <li>• The school is helping children to become more mature and responsible</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being kept better informed about how their children are getting on.</li> <li>• The amount of homework set.</li> <li>• The school working more closely with parents.</li> <li>• The range of extra-curricular activities could be extended.</li> </ul>
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Inspectors agree with the views expressed by parents in what pleases them most about the school. The judgement of the inspectors is that the amount of homework set is appropriate for pupils within the school. The current range of extra-curricular activities is judged by inspectors to be a strength of the school. The inspectors judge that there are limited opportunities for the school to work more closely with parents. However the inspectors agree with parents that the quality of reports should be improved.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

1. Pupils' overall attainment in the 1999 National Curriculum tests for 14 year olds was broadly in line with the national average and was well above in comparison with schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds. Attainment in English was above the national average and well above the average for similar schools, but only in line with national standards when compared with girls' results nationally. Attainment in mathematics was well below the national average; the comparison with similar schools showed below average attainment in mathematics. Attainment in science was below the national average but above average in comparison with similar schools. The results in these tests improved between 1996 and 1999, matching the national trend. The results in the National Curriculum tests for 2000 showed a significant increase in attainment in mathematics and are closer to the national average. Results for information and communication technology based on teacher assessments were well below the national average.

2. The standards of work seen during the inspection broadly match the levels expected nationally at the age of 14. Attainment at this age is average in English, mathematics and science. Standards at this stage are above average in art, geography and physical education. They are average in all other subjects. The difference between the test results and the work seen for mathematics and science is accounted for by improvements in the quality of teaching.

3. Pupils enter the school with a pattern of attainment that is below the national pattern. At the age of 14, pupils achieve better standards than might be expected, in relation to their earlier attainment in all subjects.

4. In the GCSE examinations in 1999, the average points score which pupils gained was below the national average but above average in comparison with schools taking pupils from a similar background. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A\* - C was close to the national average and well above average in comparison with similar schools. However, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A\*- G was well below the national average and below in comparison with similar schools. In 1999 pupils gained better results in science, design and technology, geography, German and French, than they did on average in all their subjects combined. Their results in English language, mathematics, art, information and communication technology, drama and business studies were below that average. The trend in the school's average GCSE points score was below the national trend between 1994 and 1999. In 2000 there was a significant increase in the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A\* - G, bringing the proportion close to the 1999 national average.

5. It is clear from the proportions of pupils gaining five or more A\* to C and A\* to G grades that there was good achievement, in relation to their earlier attainment, by the lower attainers in the group and higher attainers. Within the overall pattern of good achievement by pupils at the ages of 14 and 16, there are some variations between different groups of pupils. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress as they move through the school and achieve better GCSE results than might be expected. This good achievement is the result of teachers' high expectations of these pupils, in terms of their

attitude, behaviour and attainment, backed by effective support where necessary. Talented and gifted pupils also make good progress. Middle attaining pupils achieved satisfactory GCSE results in 2000 but did not do as well, relative to their earlier attainment, as the lower attainers. There are significant variations in the attainment of higher attainers between different subjects. The school is not yet making sufficient use of the strategies for raising these pupils' attainment in the more successful subjects to inform the practice in other departments.

6. The standards of work seen during the inspection match those expected nationally at the age of 16 and reflect the standards indicated by the 2000 GCSE results rather than those for 1999. Attainment is above average in art, design and technology, geography and history. In all other subjects standards are in line with those expected nationally, except for religious education and information and communication technology, where they are below average.

7. In several subjects, including English, mathematics and science, the pattern of attainment at the age of 16 matches that at the age of 14. This indicates that pupils achieve good standards at the age of 16 in relation to their earlier attainment. However, in design and technology, history, physical education and modern foreign languages pupils achieve better standards at the age of 16 than might be expected for those pupils.

8. In religious education standards are in line with those expected nationally for pupils by the age of 14 but below by 16. The explanation for this is the restricted amount of time provided for the teaching of religious education at Key Stage 4, an issue which was identified at the time of the last inspection.

9. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress throughout Key Stages 3 and 4 and those who proceed to the sixth form make satisfactory progress in the sixth form. These pupils achieve well in all subjects.

10. There are 101 pupils in the school who speak English as an additional language. Fourteen of these are at an early stage of language acquisition and are well supported by a specialist teacher for individual teaching. These pupils make good progress particularly in mathematics and science and one pupil last year achieved four 'A' grades at 'A level' in mathematics and sciences. These pupils, throughout the school, are making good progress and achieving sound standards. The school effectively monitors the attainment and attendance by pupils from different ethnic groups and there is no evidence to indicate under-achievement by groups of pupils from different ethnic minority groups.

11. Pupils who are gifted and talented make good progress throughout their schooling. They make good progress in most subjects, where they respond well to the additional opportunities and challenges which teachers provide. In mathematics from Year 9 onwards small teaching groups of approximately 12 pupils have been created to prepare pupils for the more difficult papers at Key Stage 3 and GCSE. A wide range of initiatives have been started to cater for the needs of gifted and talented pupils including an exchange visit to Spain, extra time from foreign language assistants, the introduction of separate sciences to GCSE. These initiatives are effective in raising the standards for the gifted and talented pupils.

12. Students' attainment in 'A-level' examinations in 1999 was below the national average for students following such courses. Results declined over the four years 1996 - 1999

but rose slightly in 2000. In 1999 most students in most subjects gained a grade A to E. There were few high grades in individual subjects but, in German, psychology and general studies over a third of the students gained grades A and B. In 2000 there was a slight increase in 'A level' results and students' average points score rose slightly. Over a third of students gained grades A - B in mathematics, physics and French. In science subjects a significant number of students failed to gain a pass grade.

13. In the vocational courses in the sixth form, 16 students following these courses in 1999 were successful in all the subjects they studied. This had increased to 62 in 2000. Many students following these courses gained merit grades and there were several distinctions in both advanced and intermediate courses in business and leisure and tourism.

14. In the work seen during the inspection the attainment in the sixth form was in line with that indicated by the 2000 'A level' results but nevertheless below average for such courses nationally. However, in relation to their prior levels of attainment at GCSE students are making at least satisfactory and often good progress in their 'A-level courses. Further research is needed by the school to consider whether the entry requirements for some 'A-level' courses need to be raised. The school is not providing firm enough guidance to ensure that students do not begin 'A level', A/S level or GNVQ courses which they will find too demanding and in which they have little chance of eventual success.

15. Comparison of students' 'A level' results over recent years with their attainment in GCSE examinations indicates that students usually make satisfactory progress and achieve the results which might be expected.

16. Standards of literacy are good. Most pupils achieve good reading skills. They read widely for enjoyment and read aloud with understanding and expression. Almost all pupils have reading skills that are at least satisfactory and enable them to cope with the reading demands in all subjects. Most are able to identify the key features of a text and recognise that some texts have different layers of meaning. Pupils who have particular reading difficulties are well supported and enabled to keep up with activities in the various subjects. Pupils' skills in writing are also average overall. Most pupils take pride in neat handwriting and presentation. Higher attaining pupils reach good levels of accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Teachers in most subjects emphasise the importance of key words so that pupils generally understand the meaning of these words and use them appropriately. However, for middle and lower attaining pupils there are some weaknesses in writing skills that are particularly evident in history and science. These pupils often find it difficult to write their own descriptions or answers to questions and need more support in constructing clear, ordered paragraphs. There are also weaknesses in these pupils' spelling and punctuation. Pupils are not yet making full use of the skills they develop in English lessons within other subjects of the curriculum.

17. Levels of numeracy across the curriculum are above the standard expected. There is an effective whole-school strategy in place for improving standards by developing and co-ordinating numeracy across the whole school and the teaching of numeracy is very good. Pupils are given many opportunities to use the mathematics they have been taught in mathematics lessons in different subjects. Pupils demonstrate good skills in numeracy in science and the provision is very good. They apply their understanding of data handling well in Key Stage 3. In later years they handle statistical information with examples of graph work



when studying Ohm's Law. In Year 12, they apply their understanding of formulae in physics. The quality of graph work in geography is good. In Key Stage 3, there are examples where graphs were used effectively when studying weather climates, and in the sixth form, students use statistical models to carry out "nearest neighbour" analysis. Numeracy is used to support work in design and technology. Pupils understand the need for accurate weighing, measuring and timing in food studies. They learn to measure and mark accurately before cutting out materials. There is awareness in art of proportions of materials for claywork. Pupils develop their understanding of scale and perspective in art. They scale work from small images and for figure drawing, dividing visual plants in landscapes for example, foreground, middle ground and background.

18. There has been an overall improvement in standards since the time of the previous inspection in 1995. Standards at the age of 14 are broadly the same as they were at that time. There has, however, been an improvement in GCSE results and the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A\* to C has risen from 43 per cent in 1994 to 50 per cent in 2000, broadly matching the national trend. The average points score in 'A level' examinations rose steadily from 1993 to 1996 but fell for the next three years before improving in 2000. The attainment seen in the current 'A level' groups is in line with that indicated by the 2000 results. Hence the school has made satisfactory progress in raising attainment since the previous inspection.

19. The school set appropriate targets for pupils in GCSE examinations in 2000 and 2001. In 1999 the school slightly exceeded its target for the average points score and just failed to meet its target for all pupils to gain at least one grade A\* to G. However, the school exceeded its target for the proportion of pupils gaining five or more grades A\* to C.

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

20. Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development are good. These findings are similar to those of the last inspection and reflect the school's good climate for learning.

21. The attendance rate in 1999/00 was 90.3 per cent, which is broadly satisfactory and is improved from the last inspection. Attendance for most year groups is above the benchmark of 90 per cent, but dips slightly in Year 9. A small, but significant group of pupils do not attend regularly and this has an adverse effect on their education. The main reasons for poor attendance are lack of motivation and self-esteem and parentally condoned absence. Pupils travel from a wide area to come to school, Punctuality is satisfactory.

22. Pupils make good gains in personal responsibility and maturity at the school. In some of the performing arts and dance lessons seen during the inspection pupils showed a good deal of enthusiasm and creative initiative. Pupils take an active part in school life. Several Year 9 pupils are trained as peer supporters to help younger pupils with bullying concerns. Year 8 help with reception duties and Year 11 pupils act responsibly as prefects. The school council is an effective influence on school life. The sixth formers organise charity events such as Christmas performances for the rest of the school.

23. Pupils' behaviour in and out of lessons is good. During the inspection week examples of poor behaviour were rarely observed. However a small number of pupils can present

challenging behaviour and this is reflected in the above average numbers of pupils excluded. Last year there were 3 permanent and 105 fixed period exclusions.

24. Pupils show a good respect for others and a tolerance of others' viewpoints and religions. Pupils are polite and helpful to staff and visitors and treat the school buildings with respect. Bullying is not a significant concern and is dealt with swiftly.

25. Very good relationships are evident in the school. Pupils express confidence in their teachers and say that they are helpful and friendly.

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

26. Teaching is good and has improved since the last inspection. This time, the quality of 99 per cent of lessons were at least satisfactory. Of the 194 lessons observed 1.5 per cent were judged to be excellent, 28.5 per cent very good, 51.5 per cent good, 18 per cent satisfactory and only one lesson was judged unsatisfactory. In the previous inspection only well over half of lessons were judged good or better. The overall standard of teaching is higher in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form than it is in Years 7 - 9; a higher proportion of these lessons were good or very good.

27. The good teaching is having a clear impact on the quality of learning throughout the school; pupils are making good progress. The good quality of the teaching in Years 10 and 11 helps to account for the standards at the end of this key stage. The effect on standards of attainment in the sixth form is less obvious, where, despite the good teaching, standards are average or below in some subjects. The discrepancy can be partially accounted for by the nature of the sixth form students, in particular their prior attainment. In some 'A-level' subjects, the students have been accepted on to the sixth form course with a low GCSE grade.

28. There is some variation in the quality of teaching between subjects and year groups. The quality of teaching is consistently good across all subjects at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. At Key Stage 3 the quality of teaching is very good in design and technology, good in all other subjects except for English where it is satisfactory.

29. Teaching of literacy is good. Most pupils achieve good reading skills. Writing skills are sound and many pupils reach good levels of accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar.

30. Levels of numeracy across the curriculum are above the standard expected. There is an effective whole-school strategy in place for improving standards by developing and co-ordinating numeracy across the whole school and the teaching of numeracy is very good. Pupils are given many opportunities to use the mathematics they have been taught in mathematics lessons in different subjects.

31. A feature of almost all lessons is the constructive purposeful relationship between teachers and pupils. This enables pupils to feel secure and confident enough to answer and ask questions and to show respect for their teachers.

32. Almost all teachers manage pupils' behaviour extremely well. Pupils are generally well behaved, compliant and polite. When challenging behaviour does occur teachers manage these situations well. In these tasks they are well supported by the on-call support provided by the senior and middle management teams. The challenging behaviour when it occurs causes the minimum disruption to the other pupils' learning. Pupils adapt to the pace and expectations set by the teacher and usually concentrate on their tasks. The aims of lessons are shared with pupils at the start of the lesson. This good response from pupils is undoubtedly a very significant contributory factor to their achievement.

33. Teachers plan very well for the vast majority of lessons and make good use of a range of resources. Lessons in all subjects include a variety of activities, which helps to maintain the momentum and pupils' interest. Work is usually set at a good pace to which pupils

respond well; they work hard to keep up. Occasionally the pace slackens when the time set for tasks is too generous. Little time is wasted. In most lessons teachers helpfully set time limits for tasks, which helped pupils to knuckle down and achieve more than they otherwise might.

34. A feature of many lessons is the strong subject knowledge and expertise displayed by teachers. This was often coupled with a real enthusiasm for the subject, which rubbed off on pupils. Teachers' enthusiasm and energy were common features of performing arts and design and technology lessons and help explain the popularity of the subjects. Teachers made good use of demonstration, for example in art and physical education. Language teachers spoke fluently and competently and were very good role models for pupils, who responded well. Teachers' explanations were mainly clear and accurate and ensured that pupils worked purposefully and productively.

35. Teachers often have high expectations of pupils in all year groups, and they set demanding, challenging work. In most cases this results in pupils' making good progress and great strides in their understanding and skills.

36. The school has appropriately identified pupils who are gifted or who have particular talents. The needs of the most able and talented pupils are supported well in some subjects, such as dance, physical education, mathematics, drama and music, where they are encouraged to develop their talents and excel. These pupils are not given sufficient attention in a few subjects and as a result they are not making as much progress as they otherwise might. This was evident in business studies and may help to explain the relatively low proportions of higher grade GCSEs in these subjects. Some subjects are effectively setting extension tasks to stretch the higher attaining pupils but this practice is not consistent across all subjects. For instance, in English in Years 7 - 9 when pupils are taught in groups where there is a wide range of prior attainment, higher attaining pupils are sometimes given work which is too easy for them. This improves in Years 10 and 11 where they are taught in ability groups.

37. In most subjects teachers mark pupils' work carefully and rigorously and help to identify what they need to do to improve. Marking was a weakness at the time of the last inspection - it is now a strength, especially in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Pupils are beginning to evaluate their own and others' work in many subjects. They generally understand and can explain the marking systems used by different subject teachers and have a fairly good idea of how well they are doing. Targets are set effectively in all subjects but the identification of strategies for pupils to meet these targets is not yet well developed.

38. Not all teachers make use of information and communication technology to support learning although there have been recent improvements in several subjects.

39. The setting of appropriate homework is good. Pupils carry out research, consolidate their learning and apply the skills learned in lessons.

40. The teaching of pupils with special education needs is good and helps to ensure that these pupils make good progress in lessons. Teachers have a good awareness of which pupils are on the special education needs register. The teaching of pupils at the early stages of language development in English is good.

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

41. The length of the taught day has been reviewed since the previous inspection and increased to 25 hours at Key Stage 4 and in Year 8 with adjustments planned for Year 7 and 9 next session.

42. The quality and the balance of the curriculum within Key Stage 3 has been improved with the introduction of dance, and with more pupils taking a second modern language. Information and communication technology is taught as a separate subject in Years 7 to 9. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 offers good breadth and balance although the time allocated to English is higher than the national average. This is a good feature of the curriculum given the prior attainment levels in literacy of many pupils and has favourable impact on standards. There is a whole school strategy for teaching literacy across the curriculum that is working well. A planned numeracy strategy has already been established and is operating successfully in many subjects. The curriculum fully meets statutory requirements at Key Stage 3 and provides good progression and continuity of learning overall.

43. The Key Stage 4 curriculum is mainly broad and balanced with the exception of the time allocated for religious education. It has recently been revised and is now well planned to meet the particular learning needs of pupils. It meets the provisions of the National Curriculum and includes three optional subjects chosen from a very extensive range of subjects which include child development, expressive arts, media studies and dance. All pupils take personal health, social and moral education and physical education. Gifted and talented pupils take three separate sciences and there is an extra set provided for them in mathematics in Years 10 and 11. The recent introduction of Part 1 level GNVQ courses in health and social care and business studies within the school and in information and communication technology with a local school are good innovations. The recently introduced 'ASDAN youth award' course provides a particularly useful qualification for some low attaining students as well as for other pupils who have chosen it. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 provides a relevant programme of study for pupils across the attainment range and its flexibility is a significant strength. Statutory requirements are met at Key Stage 4. There is insufficient time for religious education to meet the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus in full. Progression and continuity of learning is good and there is equal opportunity of access for all.

44. A varied and good sixth form curriculum is offered which provides opportunities that meet the needs and aspirations of all students recruited. In Year 13 a range of seventeen advanced level courses and advanced GNVQs, in art and design, travel and tourism, and health and social care and business are studied at the sixth form centre but the size of teaching groups is sometimes small which on occasions restricts students from being able to share and gain experiences from other students. In Year 12 the new curriculum 2000 is being implemented with most students selecting four 'AS level' subjects. A well-planned key skills course has been introduced. Vocational courses play an increasingly important part in the sixth form provision with 'GNVQ' courses offered at intermediate and advanced levels along with 'Btec National in Early Years'. The centre is linked with the University of Central England in providing students with a very useful qualification in the design, installation and management of computer networks. In addition the centre provides further enrichment in the form of a very good enhancement programme in particular the involvement in the

Birmingham “Lets Talk” Organisation. This has involved conferences and visits to Dublin, Belfast and the Hague. The sixth form curriculum meets statutory requirements.

45. There is very good extra-curriculum provision overall with that in sport, music, drama, dance and art being especially good but it is strong in most other departments also. In music a very wide range of opportunities are offered and activities such as the gospel, chamber, and whole school choirs, the wind band and school orchestra are popular. In information and communication technology the computer suites are extensively and productively used during lunchtimes and before and after school. In physical education, the provision of sporting activities is extensive and includes netball, badminton, football and optional swimming. Many pupils participate in activities involving drama, and dance and many subjects make their facilities available at lunchtimes and after school for activities including homework and revision classes. There are also a number of educational visits in subjects across the curriculum including visits to theatres, museums, residential visits to France and Germany in modern foreign languages, and fieldwork courses in geography, history and science which all contribute to providing an enriched curriculum.

46. Links with the local community are good with the school represented on a number of community forums. Older pupils take part in the community service scheme at a variety of local schools, charity shops, nursing homes, play groups and the Woodgate Valley Country Park. Work experience fosters very productive links with the local business community. Pupils also participate in a variety of activities organised by local industry during industry focused days. Links with feeder schools are generally satisfactory and those with higher education institutions, particularly Wolverhampton University, Birmingham University and Newman Centre are very good. Aston University provides a very helpful academic mentoring and studies support scheme for Year 13 students in preparation for their higher education.

47. Since the last inspection the school has appointed an overall co-ordinator for the taught personal, health, social and moral education programme. (PHSME). Some elements of the course are very well planned and taught such as the careers education components in Years 9 and 10. Work experience arrangements are well organised and operate effectively. However, insufficient time is provided at both Key Stages 3 and 4 to cover fully a coherent course. Problems of continuity and progression are evident within and between key stages as for example the Year 8 arrangement of one day PHSME a term to cover separate topics in citizenship, health and community. The topics for sex education are not taught until Year 9. There is a lack of careers education in Year 11. Documentation of the course is very uneven, incomplete with the programme of study for some years yet to be finalised. The taught programme is separate from the tutor time periods where some relevant topics are covered. Some of these sessions are purposeful in developing aspects of PHSME.

48. The provision the school makes for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is very good and a strength of the school. Provision for the spiritual development of pupils is good. Religious education, geography, English and performing arts all make significant contributions to the spiritual development of pupils. Opportunities are given to discuss and evaluate effectively a range of beliefs and values and to compare them with their own. In geography pupils are encouraged to appreciate the beauty of landscapes and to be in awe of the power of nature. In religious education and English pupils are given good opportunities to discover and evaluate their beliefs, values and emotions through consideration of moral and ethical issues and through writing about and reflecting on their

fears and hopes. Performing arts give very good opportunities for pupils to express themselves and to interpret feelings into dance and drama. There are too few opportunities for quiet reflection. Assemblies are good social occasions for pupils and present a good range of experiences through music, dance and readings. The good 'Thought for the week' material available to teachers is not used effectively within form tutor time and in most cases does not constitute an act of worship.

49. The provision made for the moral development of pupils is very good. The schools code of conduct material is displayed prominently in most classrooms and teachers re-enforce these consistently across the school. Pupils have a very clear understanding of what is expected of them. Teachers provide good role models for pupils. Pupils are encouraged to behave well with rewards for good behaviour. Most subjects offer opportunities for discussion of moral issues and use these to encourage pupils to act responsibly. In Year 9 the school has an innovative 'mediator' system, appreciated by pupils, where some act as mediators to whom pupils who are experiencing problems can go for help and advice. Pupils are encouraged to discuss and evaluate their own behaviour. In media studies two videos were made by pupils critically evaluating the school 'as it was' and 'as it is now'. The personal, social, moral and health education programme is also designed to encourage moral development but is not yet fully developed and its relationship to the form tutor period is unclear.

50. The social development provision for pupils is very good. There are many opportunities for pupils to take on responsibility through the prefect system and through the establishment of team leaders and deputy team leaders. There are further good opportunities for pupils to show initiative and take responsibility within form groups. The school council also works well and is appreciated by pupils as a means of being involved in taking responsibility for the school environment. Pupils in Year 8 act as receptionists for a day and many pupils are used on parents' evenings to show visitors around the school. There is a large range of extra-curricular activities including music, physical education, performing arts, Christian union, African-Caribbean culture club, visits and exchanges. All these effectively enable pupils to develop their social skills.

51. The provision made by the school for the cultural development of pupils is very good. Most subjects are very aware of the cultural diversity of the school community and reflect this in the curriculum they provide and in the opportunities given for pupils to discover their own and other pupils' cultures first hand. Concerts at Christmas and in the summer combine several performing arts activities well. There is a broad multi-cultural approach both in and beyond the formal curriculum. Pictures and displays around the school effectively reflect the cultural diversity of the school community. There are strong multi-cultural elements in most areas of the curriculum. The school makes good use opportunities to develop understanding of multi-cultural issues in assemblies, performing arts, the gospel choir, carol singing at a local hospital and other charitable and fund-raising events.

52. The quality of assemblies are good. The school has sustained its high level of provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development commended at the last inspection

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

53. The school takes good care of pupils. Pupils express confidence in their teachers, form tutors and heads of year. They settle quickly into the school after an effective induction programme. Parents are very pleased with the care and dedication shown by staff at the school.



54. Effective child protection procedures, which comply with legislation are in place. Teachers have clear guidelines and are well supported by the co-ordinator. More training for pastoral staff is required to strengthen procedures. The school takes appropriate care with health and safety. All the issues identified in the previous inspection have been rectified. Risk assessments have been carried out in all departments and the site as required.

55. Procedures to monitor and promote attendance are very good. Good attendance is suitably recognised with individual and form awards. The school now has the effective support of a full time attendance officer to monitor absence and support high levels of attendance. Teachers have worked hard and successfully to give a high profile to attendance matters in form time, pastoral meetings and in displays around the school. This increased vigilance has secured an improvement in attendance figures from the unsatisfactory level evident at the last inspection. The educational social worker and the behaviour support services work closely with the school. Currently there is a collaborative initiative to raise the self-esteem of a group of pupils in Year 9, where attendance is lowest. This is proving effective.

56. There are good procedures to monitor and promote good behaviour. In nearly all lessons seen during the week of inspection teachers had established a successful climate for learning. The behaviour policies are good and effective. Heads of year keep very good records of pupils' behaviour and attitudes. Subject teachers provide regular progress information and internal reports to the pastoral staff. This is good practice and enables the pastoral staff to monitor closely and intervene appropriately.

57. The use of individual education plans to support pupils with special educational needs is variable. They provide helpful information but the targets identified for pupils are insufficiently specific. A minority represents short steps of measurable progress towards a target attainable within a specified time. There is need to co-ordinate the extension of the best practice across all subject areas. Currently targets do not motivate pupils.

58. The school has recently received funding for an inclusion centre to help to reduce exclusions and raise attainment. The centre enables pupils who are excluded from the classroom to work in structured conditions and reduces the number of days education lost by fixed period exclusions. Pupils in the centre benefit from a careful programme of re-integration developed jointly with the pupil, their parents and the school. The school works hard to avoid excluding pupils All exclusions are carefully considered and appropriate. However despite this care the number of exclusions is higher than average for a girls' school.

59. Procedures to support personal development are good because there is an effective transfer of information between staff, good records and tutors and heads of year know their pupils well. As part of a city initiative this year to raise attainment, form tutors meet with their pupils individually about once a term to review their attitudes and set targets for improvement. This is proving effective in raising motivation. Pupils receive good guidance for their choice of options at the end of Year 9. The work experience programme for Year 11 is carefully planned and very good. However other aspects of the personal social health and moral education programme contain weaknesses.

60. The last inspection identified a need to improve the taught programme of personal and social education. There have been some improvements, but more remains to be done.

Currently the programme is too fragmented and does not enable pupils to build upon and develop their experiences. In some cases the timing of aspects of the education is not ideal. Drugs education is not adequately covered until Year 9. In some year groups there is not enough time and coverage allocated to personal and social education. For example there is a weakness in that there is no careers education in Year 11.

61. Assessment procedures and practice have improved since the last inspection and are now good. There is an impressive amount of test information on pupils, which is now computerised in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4. This enables heads of year and subject departments to track pupils' progress more easily across subjects and identifies under performance. The information is put to good use, for example in identifying Year 11 pupils, who would benefit from mentoring, which is proving effective in raising attainment levels at GCSE.

62. The use of assessment data to guide curriculum planning is good. In most subjects it is used well to group pupils or to plan teaching and work. The school has improved its use of assessment and examination data in setting targets, especially at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, although it remains a weakness in the sixth form.

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

63. Parents are pleased with the school. They feel comfortable to approach the school with any concerns, they believe that the school expects its pupils to do well and feel that their children make good progress. There was most dissent concerning the information about progress. The inspectors agree with parents' positive views and agree that improvements to the system for providing parents with information on pupils' progress would enable a closer partnership. The provision of homework, which some parents were concerned about, was found to be appropriate in quality and relevance.

64. All prospective pupils and their parents are interviewed prior to admission; this helps form an early good working relationship. Heads of year are efficient and prompt to contact parents in any cases of concern. There is however scope to increase the curriculum information provided for parents and to consult their views on a more regular basis.

65. The school provides satisfactory quality written information. Regular issues of the 'Hillcrest Messenger' keep parents well informed about school life and successes. The prospectus is well presented and informative. The performance in public examinations is published as required in the prospectus and the governors report to parents, but these do not include a comparison to national results as required.

66. The school has recently introduced interim progress reports, which are sent home to parents. These provide useful information about pupils' attitudes towards work so as to identify any concerns early. End of year written progress reports meet statutory requirements and are satisfactory. However a significant number of parents found that some sections of the reports contained too much jargon. The grades used for attainment are not adequately explained and would be improved by a comparison to national attainment to enable parents to assess their children's progress more clearly. The targets set for improvement in the reports vary in their usefulness. Some subjects, but not all, set precise and measurable ways in which pupils can improve and this helps parents to support their children's education at home.

67. Parents give sound support for the school and their children's education by backing for homework and the school discipline policy and attending the annual consultation evenings with teachers. The 'Friends of Hillcrest' sponsor the school attendance rewards and organise enjoyable events such as a disco for pupils. Several parents help in school with practical tasks such as the library or with reading and parents readily help with school trips and sports.

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

68. The leadership provided by the headteacher and senior management team is very good. The headteacher has a clear vision for the future direction of the school. She is well supported by her senior management team, whose experience and complementary skills contribute to providing effective leadership for the school. The headteacher and senior management team are pivotal in the very good systems for monitoring and evaluating the school's performance and in identifying challenging but achievable targets for improvement. A further strength of the effective leadership is the presence of members of the senior management team around the school. They are well known to pupils and pupils have confidence to approach members of the senior management team if they have any concerns. Collectively they provide very good support to teachers in dealing with pupils exhibiting challenging behaviour by providing timetable support for every lesson. However, this is an expensive support system and insufficient use is made of heads of department and year heads in providing support for teachers. There is a weakness at senior management level in co-ordinating the many very good initiatives to raise the levels of attainment for gifted and talented pupils; pupils with special educational needs and social inclusion.

69. The quality of most curriculum and pastoral leadership is good. Curriculum leadership is very good for mathematics, science, design and technology, geography, modern foreign languages and performing arts. The quality of departmental planning is good. There are good schemes of work for subjects and an effective evaluation of realistic departmental plans. There are some weaknesses in the management of information and communication technology which the school has effectively tackled with the appointment of temporary staff. There is a weakness in using information on pupils' attainment at GCSE to identify appropriate courses for students in the sixth form.

70. The management of special educational needs is satisfactory. Teachers with responsibilities for specific areas such as the gifted and talented, social inclusion and special educational needs are effective in carrying out their responsibilities. The school meets the requirements of the Code of Practice but the quality of individual education plans is variable.

71. The governing body satisfactorily fulfils its responsibilities. Members of the governing body meet regularly. They are well informed about the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Many of the governors have had a long association with the school over a number of years. In setting the budget for the current financial year the governing body has effectively targeted resources to meet the priorities of the school development plan. The governing body fulfils all of its statutory duties with the exception of providing sufficient time for teaching religious education at Key Stage 4 and in providing pupils with a daily act of collective worship.

72. Since the last inspection the school has made very good progress in monitoring and evaluating teaching and learning. It has improved its use of assessment and examination data in setting targets, especially at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, although it remains a weakness in the sixth form.

73. The school improvement plan appropriately identifies priorities for raising standards. The strength of the plan is that finances are targeted to meet priorities; and the allocation of resources to departments is based in part on departments producing detailed strategies to implement the school's priorities as well as departmental priorities.

74. The school is well placed to respond to the future demands of performance management. Heads of department are required to evaluate the work of their departments, which includes observing lessons. There is a genuine commitment and enthusiasm from the headteacher, senior management and middle management to seek improvements within the school. The management expertise is in place to provide the school with the means to raise standards further.

75. Overall, staffing is good. The school has sufficient staff to teach the National Curriculum and the staff has an appropriate range of qualifications and experience. Turnover of staff has been high, with 23 staff leaving over the last two years, most for promotion or retirement. The school effectively employs several part-time teachers. Several middle managers are new to the school and the new teachers are having a positive effect upon the quality of teaching provided. The ratio of pupils to teachers is broadly average and the amount of time that teachers spend in the classroom is low in comparison with other schools nationally. Overall staff costs are below average. Some staff (for example, those supporting some of the pupils with special needs), are funded from outside the school. The school supports the training of teachers from local colleges and of languages assistants. The number of staff supporting pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. There is appropriate support from technicians in the practical subjects. Their work raises the quality of learning, especially in science, design and technology and information and communication technology. The number of administrative staff, including the librarian, and premises staff is satisfactory; their hard work makes a valuable contribution to the work of the school.

76. Staff development is well organised. There is a valuable induction programme which is appreciated by teachers new to the school. The programme is well organised. Full records of in-service courses attended by staff are maintained and judgements about the quality of training are made to ensure that resources are targeted efficiently. In-service training is matched to the needs of the school and departments. Many teachers have been trained in the use of information and communication technology to support learning in their subjects. Most teachers are confident in their use of computers.

77. The expenditure per pupil is slightly above the national average. The sixth form provision is cost effective.

78. Finances are effectively managed. The most recent auditor's report identified no significant issues. The large carry forward figure of over £117,000 at the end of the last financial year is misleading. Most of these funds were for planned expenditure. The school has an appropriate fund to meet contingencies and unexpected expenditure. Specific grants for special educational needs and the standards fund are effectively spent on the purposes for which they were intended.

79. Considerable improvement in the quantity and quality of the accommodation has been made since the last inspection. A new suite of rooms for design and technology and improved facilities for science have been provided since the last inspection.



80. The overall accommodation is adequate to teach the curriculum. There are weaknesses in accommodation for special educational needs and art

81. The accommodation is well kept and there is no evidence of graffiti. The standard of display in corridors around the school is very good, with prominent displays of pupils' achievements and recognition of the rich contributions from different cultural traditions. The building has severe access problems for the disabled.

82. Since the last inspection there has been generous and systematic financing of the school's resources; as a consequence resources are generally good and they effectively support learning. There are weaknesses in textbooks for German and religious education. An increase both in the number and quality of computers has improved the use pupils make of information and communication technology. The number of modern computers in the school is below the national average for a school of this size. There are constraints in access to the use of computers by many subject areas which prevents pupils from taking full advantage of modern technologies to support learning. Most departments are well resourced to teach pupils with modern and up to date textbooks.

83. The school has a well-managed open learning centre, which offers a range of services to pupils and staff. The centre is housed in a modern and attractive room. The services include a range of fiction and non-fiction, periodicals, newspapers, CD-ROMs and computers. The book stock is of poor quality and many books have been on the shelves and unused for many years and need removing. Pupils are encouraged to use the facility before and after school, at breaks and during lunchtimes.

84. Since the last inspection the school has made good progress in improving resources. Overall the school provides good value for money.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

85. In order to raise standards and improve the quality of education the headteacher, staff and governors should:

- (1) Improve the level of resources and co-ordination of information and communication technology by:
  - Improving the access for teachers to use information and communication technology to support learning in subjects;
  - Determining a permanent structure for the management of information and communication technology.(Paragraphs 69, 82, 143-157)
- (2) Increase the amount of time allocated to religious education at Key Stage 4.  
(Paragraph 43)
- (3) Revise the criteria for entry onto sixth form ‘ A level ‘ courses to ensure that there is a better match between pupils’ prior achievements at GCSE with their potential for success at ‘A level’.  
(Paragraph 14)
- (4) Provide a coherent programme for personal and social education across Years 7- 11 by:
  - Providing planned schemes of work for each year group;
  - Co-ordinating the development of skills, knowledge and understanding across year groups;
  - Ensuring timetabled provision for personal and social education in all year groups;
  - Ensuring the contribution of form tutor time is recognised as contributing towards a planned programme for personal and social education.(Paragraphs 47, 60)
- (5) Re-allocate responsibilities between senior management and middle management by:
  - Increasing the responsibility for heads of year and heads of department to support classroom teachers in the management of pupils and reduce the direct involvement by members of the senior management team;
  - Co-ordinating at senior management level the provision for gifted and talented pupils; pupils with special educational needs, social inclusion and for those pupils with English as an additional language.(Paragraph 68)

In addition the governing body may wish to include the following less important issues for consideration within the action plan:



Provision of a daily act of collective worship for all pupils (paragraph 71); improve resources in the open learning centre( paragraph 83); reports for parents (paragraph 63); partnership with parents ( paragraph 63); increasing the low contact ratio (paragraph 75).

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	194
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
1.5	28.5	51.5	18.0	0.5	0	0

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

### *Information about the school's pupils*

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	885	155
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	311	N/A

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	6	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	147	0

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	101

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	52
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	82

### *Attendance*

<b>Authorised absence</b>	%
School data	90.3
National comparative data	91.0

<b>Unauthorised absence</b>	%
School data	1.1
National comparative data	1.1

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

### *Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3*

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Girls	Total
	2000	178	178

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Girls	124	98	92
	Total	124	98	92
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	69.6 (73)	55 (47)	51.6 (50)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	33.7 (39)	35.3 (17)	26.9 (10)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Girls	130	114	93
	Total	130	114	93
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	73 (67)	64 (51)	52.2 (46)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	42.6 (36)	39.8 (23)	30.8 (12)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

## Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Girls	Total
	2000	161	161

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	Girls	80	147	153
	Total	80	147	153
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	50 (49)	91.3 (85)	95 (94)
	National	49 (46.6)	88.8 (90.9)	94.4 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	36.2 (33)
	National	38.7 (38.0)

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

## Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	6	49	55

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	9.5	14.2	13.6 ( 10.3)	2.5	2.8	2.8 (5.1)
National	19.2	19.8	19.5 (17.9)	3.1	3.4	3.2 (2.8)

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

### *Ethnic background of pupils*

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	114
Black – African heritage	6
Black – other	1
Indian	46
Pakistani	33
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	16
White	736
Any other minority ethnic group	91

### *Exclusions in the last school year*

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	25	1
Black – African heritage	1	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	1	0
Pakistani	2	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	63	2
Other minority ethnic groups	13	0

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

### *Teachers and classes*

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

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	60.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.1

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

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

Total number of education support staff	14
Total aggregate hours worked per week	362

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

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	71.7
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	25.8
Key Stage 4	22.9

### *Financial information*

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	3 146 052
Total expenditure	3 103 933
Expenditure per pupil	2 985
Balance brought forward from previous year	74 881
Balance carried forward to next year	117 000

## ***Results of the survey of parents and carers***

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	1020
Number of questionnaires returned	307

### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	43	50	4	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	50	45	2	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	33	52	8	2	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	30	49	13	6	2
The teaching is good.	29	63	4	0	4
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	25	50	17	5	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	49	42	5	3	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	62	34	2	1	1
The school works closely with parents.	29	47	15	3	6
The school is well led and managed.	36	50	4	3	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	40	50	5	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	27	47	13	4	9

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

### **ENGLISH**

86. Pupils' attainment in English by the end of Year 9 is broadly in line with what is achieved by girls nationally at the age of fourteen. The reported results from the 1999 National Curriculum tests indicate that pupils' performance is well above the national average in comparison with the average for both girls and boys in similar schools. Taking the four years 1996 to 1999 together the performance of pupils in English was close to the national average for girls. These results have been higher than the results in mathematics and science. The 2000 results in English are lower than the results in 1999 and just below the national average for girls.

87. Comparisons with pupils' attainment on entry to the school indicate that most pupils make satisfactory progress throughout Years 7 to 9. However, because pupils are taught in groups with a wide range of levels of attainment, the highest attaining pupils are not always given work of an appropriate level of difficulty. In Year 7 some pupils with special educational needs and lower attaining pupils are taught English in small groups. In Years 8 and 9 they are taught in mainstream classes. When there is additional support these pupils make satisfactory progress, but in many lessons there is no specialist support and they find it difficult to keep up. Most pupils achieve good reading skills and read aloud with understanding and expression because their teachers give them opportunities to extend and practise their skills. By the age of fourteen most pupils can identify the features which contribute to a text's overall effect. During Key Stage 3, teachers give pupils the opportunity to write in a range of different styles. By linking this to the reading of a variety of literary and non-literary texts, pupils gain an understanding of how to write to entertain, persuade, inform or analyse. Most pupils are confident speakers and, when given the opportunity to work in groups, collaborate well and generally respond sensitively to other pupils' contributions.

88. Pupils' overall attainment in English at the end of Year 11 is about average for their age. Although in the 1999 GCSE examinations pupils' performance was below girls' national standards, the 2000 results show good improvement in both English and English literature. Higher attaining pupils achieve very good standards and in the 1999 GCSE examinations the proportion of A\* and A grades were similar to those achieved by girls nationally. Pupils with special educational needs also achieve well in GCSE examinations. Most gain two GCSE grades at the end of Year 11 and this is a real strength of the department's work.

89. This good achievement is the result of the focused teaching in Years 10 and 11. The curriculum has been developed to enable pupils to achieve success in GCSE examinations. Examination techniques are highlighted in many lessons. Groups are made up of pupils with similar levels of prior attainment and this means that they are given work that is better matched to their needs than in Years 7 to 9. High attaining pupils read a range of challenging texts using inference and deduction to recognise different layers of meaning. In their writing they show a good command of language. There are examples of sensitive and perceptive poetry of a high quality published in a Birmingham schools' anthology. Many have very good speaking skills. They are confident and fluent speakers in both informal and formal situations. Average and lower attaining pupils also benefit from teaching that is better matched to their needs. Although they study the same texts as higher attainers, the approach to the text and the

tasks they are set enable them to achieve appropriate standards. This was illustrated by two lessons on *Romeo and Juliet*. In one, pupils were able to analyse with some skill the poetic language used in the opening sonnet. In another class, pupils were reading speeches and discussing characters' motivation with these scenes being linked by video clips. They were able to gain a good understanding of the play while focusing on the most important features.

90. Standards of literacy are good. Most pupils achieve good reading skills. They read widely for enjoyment and read aloud with understanding and expression. Almost all pupils have reading skills that are at least satisfactory and enable them to cope with the reading demands in all subjects. Most are able to identify the key features of a text and recognise that some texts have different layers of meaning. Pupils who have particular reading difficulties are well supported and enabled to keep up with activities in the various subjects. Pupils' skills in writing are also average overall. Most pupils take pride in neat handwriting and presentation. Higher attaining pupils reach good levels of accuracy in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Teachers in most subjects emphasise the importance of key words so that pupils generally understand the meaning of these words and use them appropriately. However, for middle and lower attaining pupils there are some weaknesses in writing skills that are particularly evident in history and science. These pupils often find it difficult to write their own descriptions or answers to questions and need more support in constructing clear, ordered paragraphs. There are also weaknesses in these pupils' spelling and punctuation. Pupils are not yet making full use of the skills they develop in English lessons within other subjects of the curriculum.

91. Standards achieved by pupils in the 'A level' English literature examination are below national standards although in 2000 there has been a distinct improvement. All students entered gained at least a grade E and the percentage achieving A or B rose from 18 percent in 1999 to 24 percent. Students now in Year 13 are attaining standards in line with expectations for the course and are achieving well. They have produced effective comparisons of the set texts *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Wuthering Heights* and perceptive essays on Thomas Hardy's poetry.

92. There are 13 pupils who are at various stages of acquiring English as an additional language. The school provides well for these pupils and they make good progress. The specialist teacher is very effective in helping these pupils to develop their language skills.

93. The quality of teaching in English is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, and good in Years 10 to 13. This difference in quality is related in some cases to the ways in which pupils are grouped. In some lessons in Key Stage 3, and particularly those based on literature, all pupils are set the same tasks. In one lesson when pupils of high attainment finished work quickly, they were told to read on in the novel and then the same extract was set for other pupils to read for homework. The teacher missed opportunities to set more challenging work to enable these pupils to reach higher standards. In another lesson Year 7 pupils were expected to work for too long on one activity and they lost interest and became bored. On the other hand some good lessons were observed which were effective in providing work that gave all pupils the opportunity to succeed. For instance, Year 9 pupils were taught about the techniques that charity leaflets use to persuade people to donate money. The teacher skilfully combined direct teaching and group work so that by the end of the lesson all pupils were able to identify these techniques and describe their effect on the reader. Further examples of the effective use of group work and discussion were seen in Years 10 and 11. Pupils are able to learn from each



other, to develop their own ideas and refine them in the light of other people's contributions. Other strengths are the use of homework to consolidate and test what has been learned and to prepare for the next lesson. Marking is used effectively in Key Stage 4 to help pupils improve their work; teachers often write copious notes on pupils' work developing a dialogue which extends pupils' thinking and understanding. Assessment at all levels to monitor pupils' attainment and progress is a strong feature of the department's work. It is used to target those who are not achieving appropriate standards and as a firm basis for curriculum planning.

94. Pupils' learning and their attitudes and behaviour are directly related to the quality of teaching. When lessons are planned with a range of appropriate activities that build on earlier learning and are conducted at a brisk pace then pupils become engaged in the work, concentrate well and make good intellectual and creative effort. When these features are not present, then pupils lose interest, do not concentrate on their work and the behaviour of a minority is at times challenging.

95. The English department is currently going through a period of staffing instability. Nevertheless, the experienced members of the department and the detailed, clear handbook give excellent support to supply teachers and newly qualified teachers. This is a department that, because of good leadership and management and strong teamwork, has the capacity to effect the improvements needed to the provision for pupils in Key Stage 3.

### ***Drama***

96. Drama is taught as a separate subject for all pupils in Years 7 to 9 and as an optional GCSE subject in Years 10 and 11. Together with media studies in the sixth form, it forms part of the performing arts department. Although the GCSE results in drama are below national standards, pupils achieve high standards in lessons. They are able to absorb themselves totally in the drama, express themselves lucidly and with confidence. Some very sensitive and perceptive work on the characters in *Dancing at Lughnasa* in a Year 11 lesson was seen. The quality of teaching is very good; lessons offer pupils the opportunity to plan, develop and assess their own work and to exercise real creativity.

## **MATHEMATICS**

97. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests at age 14 the proportions of pupils attaining level 5 and above and level 6 and above were well below the national average. The average National Curriculum points score in 1999 was well below the national average for all schools. There was no significant difference between the teacher assessment and test results. When compared with schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds, the National Curriculum results were below average. The results in mathematics were below those in English and science. There was significant improvement in mathematics results in 2000 and results were close to the national average.

98. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, the proportions of pupils achieving grades A\* to C were significantly below the national average and the proportion of pupils achieving grades A\* to G was below the national average. The average point score for GCSE was well below the national average. Pupils attained results in mathematics significantly lower than in the other subjects they studied. There was an outstanding improvement in results in 2000 in comparison with the 1999 results and there is an improving trend.

99. Results attained in mathematics at GCE 'A level' in 1999 were well below course expectations. There was an improvement in Year 2000 and the attainment of the present year 13 is in line with course expectations. There is an improving trend.

100. Evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that the standards that pupils achieve at 14 are broadly in line with the level expected of 14 year olds nationally. The difference between the standards in tests and in the work seen lies in the improvements that have been made in the quality of teaching. Pupils enter the school with levels of attainment that are below average. They respond well to good teaching and the majority of pupils make good progress. When investigating problems, middle-attaining pupils apply their understanding of how to calculate numbers effectively. The numeracy skills of the low attaining pupils are good for the level of ability. They have a sound understanding of place value and can multiply and divide by 10 and 100. High attainers apply their understanding of Pythagoras theorem well to calculate sides of right-angled triangles. They progress to solving problems in two dimensions. Middle attainers calculate the areas of triangles and compound shapes. They extend their understanding of areas by calculating areas of circles. A minority of these pupils experience difficulty in applying the formula. When studying data handling, low attainers plot frequency diagrams while the middle attainers demonstrate a good understanding of scatter diagrams. They understand correlation and use information and communication technology appropriately to help them with their work. They work very well together when using computers.

101. Evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that the standards that pupils are achieving at age 16 are broadly in line with the level expected of pupils of the same age nationally. In Years 10 to 11, pupils make steady progress in relation to their prior attainment. When solving problems, high attainers evaluate a number of approaches to the problem. They explore new areas of mathematics and apply the mathematics they have learnt through the key stage. The middle attainers organise their results well whilst low attainers introduce different patterns and find relationships between them. Middle attainers are developing sound skills in algebra. When investigating tangents to curves, high attainers quickly grasp the significance of the changing value. They demonstrate a high level of understanding of trigonometry. Low attainers are able to calculate percentage increase and decrease, although their mental arithmetic skills are less well developed.

102. Evidence gathered during the inspection indicates that students in Years 12 and 13 are now achieving standards that are broadly in line with course expectations. Students solve trigonometrical equations and sketch the graphs in order give all the solutions. They can expand the general formula for the binomial coefficients and apply the binomial theorem accurately. They confidently differentiate parametric equations. They carry out research, for example when getting information from the Internet for the Greek alphabet in Year 12.

103. Levels of numeracy across the curriculum are above the standard expected. There is an effective whole-school strategy in place for improving standards by developing and co-ordinating numeracy across the whole school. The teaching of numeracy is very good. Pupils are given many opportunities to use the mathematics they have been taught in mathematics lessons in different subjects. Pupils demonstrate good skills in numeracy in science and the provision is very good. They apply their understanding of data handling well in Years 7 to 9. In later years they handle statistical information with examples of graph work when studying Ohm's Law. In Year 12, they apply their understanding of formulae in physics. The quality of

graph work in geography is good. In Key Stage 3, there are examples where graphs were used effectively when studying weather climates, and in the sixth form, students use statistical models to carry out “nearest neighbour “ analysis. Numeracy is used to support work in design and technology. Pupils understand the need for accurate weighing, measuring and timing in food studies. They learn to measure and mark accurately before cutting out materials. In music, in Year 7, there is demanding use of rhythm grid in parts over eight beats. Pupils are particularly successful in concentrating on counting beats. There is awareness in art of proportions of materials for claywork. Pupils develop their understanding of scale and perspective in art. They scale work from small

images and for figure drawing, dividing visual plants in landscapes for example, foreground, middle ground and background.

104. Overall, pupils' achievement in mathematics is good as they progress through the school and into the sixth form. Pupils with special educational needs and the gifted and talented pupils achieve in line with other pupils at Key Stage 3, but their achievement is better at Key Stage 4 where they are taught in smaller groups. The overall improvement in attainment and achievement is due to better teaching methods, very good leadership, better management of the mathematics department and the strong commitment from teachers. Pupils concentrate well in lessons and their behaviour is very good. This has a positive effect on both their achievement and attainment. The department provides good opportunities for pupils to achieve well. The higher attaining pupils along with the gifted and talented pupils are taught in smaller groups at Key Stage 4 and they make good progress with more challenging work. There is good support for the lower attainers and these pupils achieve well. Pupils with special educational needs are taught in the group that is most appropriate in relation to their attainment. They receive effective support from teachers and support assistants. Pupils with English as an additional language make at least satisfactory progress.

105. The overall quality of teaching is good in all years resulting in good learning. In lessons and work seen during the inspection, teaching was good overall and there were examples of very good teaching. Teaching is never less than satisfactory and the majority of lessons were good.

106. There are many good features of the teaching and teachers demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of mathematics in Years 7 to 13. This is illustrated by very clear explanation of tasks and the confident and appropriate use of mathematical terms. This promotes the respect of the pupils. The very good relationships between pupils and teachers promote an eagerness to learn. The teaching of basic literacy is sound and the teaching of numeracy skills is good. There are good displays around the classrooms and mathematical terms are introduced in lessons. Teachers are developing the use of information and communication technology in their lessons, but it is not yet integrated effectively into schemes of work. Teachers plan lessons well. There are clear learning objectives and effective structure to the lesson. Teachers generally set a brisk pace that motivates pupils and sustains their concentration. There is good effort and concentration by pupils and a good pace of working and amount of work achieved in lessons. This has a positive effect on their acquisition and consolidation of skills and understanding. Teachers generally assess pupils' understanding effectively, but they do occasionally miss opportunities to assess pupils' understanding by questions and answers. Teachers' expectations are high, leading to pupils being challenged. For example, the teacher quickly moved through increasingly difficult examples when teaching middle attainers in Year 7. They progress from substituting in simple expressions to formulae used in science. Teaching methods are generally good. Teachers use an effective combination of explanation, discussion, and individual work. The structure of the lesson is particularly good where the lesson is broken down into a variety of activities that maintains the pupils' interest and motivation. The management of pupils is very good and as a result pupils' behaviour is generally very good enabling them to make the best progress. They listen attentively to their teachers and are polite and courteous. The very good relationship between teachers and pupils promotes a good working atmosphere in the classroom. Consequently, pupils are keen to progress and they make gains in understanding and experiencing new mathematics. Teachers work well with educational support assistants

and team teachers to ensure those pupils with special educational needs make effective progress. Teachers plan homework well so that it consolidates learning and deepens understanding. Marking is thorough and follows the marking policy. This enables pupils to understand how they are progressing. Teachers write constructive comments that help pupils to see where they have made mistakes. However this is not consistently practised.

107. The subject is very well managed and the quality of leadership is very good. The staff work very well together and the whole department places a high emphasis on raising achievement in mathematics. They are a dedicated and committed team. There is a good development plan that reflects the schools' priorities for raising achievement. There is very good support for teachers and an effective monitoring system of teaching and learning has contributed well to the good teaching. The procedures for assessing pupils' performance in mathematics are good and pupils' progress is tracked thoroughly as they proceed through the school. The quality and range of learning opportunities for pupils and students is very good. In Years 7 and 8, all pupils extend their thinking skills by the introduction of the Cognitive Acceleration in Mathematical Education programme of study. Pupils who are gifted and talented are identified and these are taught in smaller groups so that lessons provide challenge. These pupils have the opportunity to visit Birmingham University to develop their problem solving skills. Many visits with a mathematical focus are arranged and pupils complete appropriate tasks to extend their understanding and application of mathematics.

108. The department has made good progress since the previous inspection. Pupils' standards of achievement have improved. The quality of teaching and learning has improved. There has been an improvement in whole department planning as a result of the very good quality of leadership. Although accommodation is satisfactory, there remains insufficient specialist teaching rooms. This limits the effect of stimulating display and access to resources.

## **SCIENCE**

109. In September 2000, the attainment of pupils on entry to the subject at the end of Key Stage 2 was below national expectations. The 1999 National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 indicate that the percentage of pupils reaching level 5 or above, 50 per cent, was close to the national average and that of pupils reaching level 6 or above, 10 per cent, was well below the national average. The performance is below the national average when compared to all schools, but is above average when compared to schools with similar backgrounds, being well above, for those achieving level 5 and above, and below, for those achieving level 6 and above. Performance in science was better than in mathematics but not as good as the pupils' performance in English. At this key stage, taking the four years 1996-1999, together, the performance of pupils is below the national average compared to all schools. Comparing average points, for this period, performance has not improved since 1997, when results were broadly in line with the national average for all schools, but above average, when compared to schools with similar backgrounds. In 2000, the percentage of pupils reaching level 5 or above is similar to that in 1999, 52 per cent, but there is a significant increase in the percentage of pupils achieving level 6 and above, to 26 per cent. Teacher assessment closely mirrors these results.

110. In the 1999 GCSE double award science examinations, in an entry of ninety per cent of the pupils in the year cohort, 57 per cent achieved grades A\*-C, compared to the national averages of 49 per cent for girls, and 48 per cent for all pupils. Nearly all the pupils achieved

levels A\*-G. In 2000, in a year cohort of 161 pupils, 47 per cent, of an entry of 151 pupils achieved grades A\*-C, in double award science. All except one pupil achieving A\*-G. The number of pupils entered for 'A level' examinations in biology were low, and in chemistry and physics were very low, in both 1999 and 2000. In 1999, grades A-C were obtained by 23 per cent of the entry in biology, 17 per cent in physics, and 33 per cent in chemistry. In 2000, in each of the three sciences grades A-C were achieved by 50 per cent of the pupils entered.

111. In the work seen pupils' standards of attainment in the school are in line with national expectations. At the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is in line with national expectations. In this key stage pupils are taught in mixed ability groups in Year 7 and sets in Years 8 and 9. Throughout the key stage, pupils make at least satisfactory progress in all lessons. Good progress is made in Year 7 by pupils in their understanding of the specialist functions of certain human body cells. Higher attaining pupils are able to make their own notes and extract relevant information from a short video. Pupils with special educational needs made good progress with the aid of a support teacher. Pupils with English as an additional language make satisfactory progress. Other pupils, as part of their investigations, are able to show the different graphical relationships between variables when studying stretched springs and a heated fluid, Many draw graphs correctly with minimum guidance. Higher and lower attaining pupils in Year 8 understand digestion and know the role of enzymes. Both groups are able to perform similar investigations, to confirm their predictions. Higher attainers enjoyed their role-play as molecules, and made good progress in their understanding of the effects of temperature on enzymes. Higher attaining pupils in Year 9 use word equations and can identify ways that mixtures of different composition can be separated. They are able to plan a systematic separation of a complex mixture. Lower attainers know that in their study of lenses, there is a pattern between image distance and object distance and their seeing a sharp inverted image on a screen. Throughout the key stage many pupils show real awareness of previous work. Pupils are mainly attentive, responding politely to questions, by raising hands, and giving good quality answers. They work co-operatively together, and listen to others. They take a pride in the presentation of their work. Handwriting standards are good throughout the key stage.

112. Attainment at the age of 16 is in line with national expectations. Progress is never less than satisfactory and is frequently good or very good. Higher attaining pupils in Year 10, in role-play, write a letter to a nephew, using their scientific and literacy skills, to best advise how to be cost-effective when using limited funds to insulate a house. Other pupils in Year 10 watched attentively during the dissection of a heart and are able to identify the various parts and their functions within it, and to express their knowledge in diagrammatic format. Some Year 11 pupils, in their study of limpets, and others by their collection of information related to height, weight and the tongue rolling of fellow pupils are able to distinguish between continuous and discontinuous variation and the way that it emerges from genetic and, or, environmental causes. They can illustrate their investigations graphically. Using many, appropriately chosen, examples of plant life pupils are aware that sexual reproduction produces variation but asexual variation produces clones. Lower attaining pupils in Year 11 discover, from their investigation, that transition metals form coloured compounds and their oxides can act as catalysts. In this key stage, pupils are mainly attentive to teachers, handle apparatus with care, working co-operatively when sharing ideas and equipment. On the two occasions when individual pupils made it obvious they were not anxious to work, other pupils ignored their actions, and kept to task, whilst the teacher dealt with the matter. Pupils with

special educational needs make good progress, teachers adapting their teaching method or giving additional individual support.

113. Sixth form achievement is good. They are often taught in small groups. Chemistry students in Year 12 confidently assemble apparatus as they safely extract a metal from its ore using a vacuum pump. They make good use of waiting time, using their textbooks, to pursue further information. Year 12 Biology students, working co-operatively together, are able to carry out a series of simple biochemical tests related to sugars, proteins and lipids. The teacher quickly pointed out shortfalls in experimental technique. Year 12 Physics pupils use a Leclanche cell in their determination of internal resistance and electro-motive force. They can use appropriate language and conventions to explain their workings. Initially some pupils had difficulty, understanding how to use a resistance box. A Year 13 student, working individually, was able to clearly explain her investigation related to the absorption of radiation by different thickness of materials.

114. Overall, teaching is good. The high quality of teaching has a positive impact on pupils' learning. Since the previous inspection, there has been an introduction of a subject assessment policy and the development of a marking scheme consistent with the school policy. The development of investigative coursework and practical work, and the provision of an appropriate commercial text has given staff the opportunity to plan lessons which include variety, pace and imagination. There is now very little evidence of the use of photocopied worksheets. In Key Stage 3, teaching is good. In Key Stage 4, teaching is good and on occasions very good or excellent. Teaching is never less than satisfactory. A committed staff, with a wide range of teaching experience, has good specialist subject knowledge. Through good relationships, they challenge, and have high expectations of, pupils. Pupils with special educational needs and gifted and talented pupils receive good support. Teachers are familiar with the contents and requirements of individual education plans. Using good quality technician support efficiently, investigative or demonstration work is used regularly and appropriately. Health and safety considerations are evident in all lessons and risk assessments have been carried out. Time and classroom management skills are strength of the department. Learning objectives are always clearly stated and written at the beginning of lessons and the learning of pupils is checked at the end of the lesson, in most lessons. Both, literacy and numeracy skills, are promoted within lessons. Graphs are often used well to display results from experiments. The use of information technology within the department is insufficient. Staff training, the provision of cabling, and the preparation of a scheme of work for this aspect, are in place and the provision of hardware is awaited. The department currently has a small number of older machines. Evidence was seen of high quality computer generated word processing and diagrammatic course and project work in Year 9. The regular and consistent marking of work is evident within the department. The decision that all work is recorded in exercise books, throughout both key stages, ensures that work is properly organised and is easily referenced. Appropriate and adequate homework is set according to a set timetable.

115. Strong leadership of the department during the last two years has seen the recent introduction of a range of new policies and innovations including those for subject assessment and target setting. The provision of text-books and the purchase of texts, to support both the less and the more able assist raising academic standards. The introduction of homework books and extra-curricular opportunities for the more able in Year 9, allied to the curriculum opportunities offered to the higher attainers in Key Stage 4, all contribute to raising standards. The curriculum is broad and balanced and meets statutory requirements. The departmental policy for information and communication technology has not yet been implemented. The display of work in laboratories is attractive and of a high standard. Photographs show the involvement of pupils in field studies and environmental work. A well-



attended science club is held regularly for pupils in Years 7 and Year 8. Resources are adequate and well managed. There is a narrow range of reference material in the open learning centre. The department still contains teaching materials that have been in the school for many years, and its storage is inappropriate. The provision of two new laboratories in recent years has helped centralise the department, however the one remaining laboratory lacks proper maintenance and security.

## **ART AND DESIGN**

116. At Key Stage 3 the attainment of the majority of pupils is in line with national levels. By the end of Year 9 pupils have learned to use a variety of techniques which they apply well to their work. They are able to use line, tone and texture effectively in their drawings and understand three-dimensional concepts.

117. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils are achieving national standards. They are able to sustain and develop a chosen theme in their work and can investigate and explain their use of a range of visual and other sources in order to do so. By the end of the sixth form, students are confident in a range of media, using both traditional and more original techniques.

118. Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language respond well to the subject and make good progress at all key stages. They benefit from individual attention and they frequently show attainment which is higher than expected of them. Since the last inspection the trend in GCSE results has been steadily rising and now the proportion of pupils gaining A\*- C grades is in line with national expectations. In 2000, the 'A Level' results were not as good as those in 1999, but students taking GNVQ Intermediate and Advanced courses gained one merit and distinction.

119. In Key Stage 3 pupils' achievements and progress in investigating and making in art is good with knowledge and understanding of composition and competent tonal investigation evident. They explore ideas through much of their drawing, painting and design work and there are good examples of expressive mixed media work. Pupils are given the opportunity to study a wide range of artists, designers and crafts-people and make good use of contemporary culture. Since the last inspection sketchbook work is now well established in the department and used effectively.

120. In Key Stage 4 pupils' achievements are good, They experiment well and make successful expressive observational drawings and paintings. They also demonstrate their personal interests, ideas and responses to their own and other cultures through the work they make. They show good knowledge and skills in the application of paint and colour and experiment with mixed media well. They make good use of combining observation with a range of secondary sources and often show the influence of different cultures, including Mexican art, important movements in art, or particular artists. In the sixth form students make good progress in a variety of media areas. They experiment with combinations of different media and the standard of sketchbook work is very good.

121. The quality of teaching is always good and sometimes very good and makes a positive contribution to the standards achieved. The teachers create a secure framework for learning and provide individual support when it is needed. Teachers have good levels of subject expertise and use their own media skills to demonstrate techniques to the pupils. Careful,

clear explanations and good intervention at key points in pupils' learning enable pupils to make good progress. In the majority of lessons time is set aside to ensure that all pupils know and understand what they are expected to learn, both in the lessons and for homework, which is set and marked regularly. In a Year 11 lesson pupils were developing ideas from direct observation, making personal choices and incorporating a variety of media skills. They were confident and demonstrated some good knowledge and understanding of the connections made with artists' styles which had influenced their work.

122. The teachers establish an effective working ethos in which pupils are expected to behave and do their best. The good relationships they have with pupils contribute to this ethos. Pupils are usually well motivated and respectful to adults and each other. Lessons are orderly and characterised by good relationships. Pupils enjoy their art lessons and apply themselves purposefully to their projects. Sixth-formers speak confidently about their work and demonstrate good knowledge and understanding.

123. The subject is well led and managed. Teaching schemes and departmental policies are clear, comprehensive and provide good guidance for teachers. All members of the team are well informed through formal and informal meetings and all contribute to creating a successful department. Individual teachers' strengths are deployed well to ensure pupils experience different aspects of art. The head of art monitors the work of her colleagues through classroom observations and work sampling. There is access to computers within the art department and their use is being integrated into the schemes of work. The teaching of claywork would benefit from more technical support and the improvement of storage and preparation space which are still inadequate. Continued visits to museums and galleries will improve pupils' awareness and help raise their attainment.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

124. Pupils enjoy design and technology lessons and their work shows innovation in design and skill in manufacture.

125. The overall attainment of pupils in design and technology at the end of Year 9 is above the national average. In the most recent teachers' assessments, the percentage of pupils attaining level 3 is less than the national average and the percentages of pupils attaining levels 4 and 5 are greater than those expected nationally. Fewer pupils, however, attain levels 6 and beyond. In lessons observed during the inspection, pupils show good skills in both designing and making. They translate a given problem sensibly and can devise a number of possible solutions. Drawing skills are average, but pupils generally annotate their design work well to explain to the reader what is intended. They follow the design process systematically, by conducting research, undertaking questionnaires, analysing results and making a few preliminary attempts before making final decisions. They select the most appropriate design and develop it into a product, using a wide range of techniques, tools and materials. They show good skills in completing their work as they can assess the quality of the finished result, and spot where it needs improving. Skills in handling food and resistant materials are highest at the end of the Key Stage, as the technological approach to the work is good. Pupils are working well in textiles, albeit on simple items, which are building up the required basic skills. During the inspection, pupils in Year 9 were investigating the role of different ingredients in bakery, designing a range of celebration cakes, making torches that will flash and beam and creating a range of textile items for their bedrooms. In most instances, the

quality of the practical work is high. Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language are encouraged to set themselves realistic tasks at their own levels, which do not over face them so they gain in confidence as a result. Pupils who are gifted and talented are allowed scope in lessons to do more work at higher levels and as a result, show ingenuity in designing.

126. The attainment of pupils at the end of Year 11 is above the national average. The percentage of pupils gaining grades A\* to C in design and technology in 1999 was above the national average and in 2000, there was an 11 per cent increase which is now well above the national average. Over the past two years, the results in design and technology have been among the highest in school and show an overall upward trend over the past four years. Pupils who take GCSE in the subject usually gain at least a G grade, which is in line with national expectations. Results vary between the material areas. Graphics are the highest, followed by food, resistant materials and textiles, but in all areas, the percentage of passes at A\* to C are above the national expectations for schools of this type. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils have achieved well and have a good grasp of what technology means and understand that the designing and making processes are interlinked. They successfully undertake research and are used to making prototypes and samples to be sure that final decisions are realisable. Pupils are skilled in using both hand and power tools and are confident in using them. Their portfolio work is good, showing many pages of good quality design drawings, investigations, examples and evaluations. During the inspection, pupils in Year 11 were working mainly on investigations and evaluation of commercial products. They discovered, and made suggestions for improvement, in basic design faults in a range of picnic furniture and conducted sensory analysis of new bread products. In textiles, they worked out specifications for major projects such as theatre costume, co-ordinated uniforms and pre-school clothes. Many portfolios, especially ones done in food technology, show very good use of information technology and high skill in merging text, graphics, charts and graphs. Pupils use the Internet successfully. Their research findings are lifting their overall knowledge and understanding.

127. The attainment of students in the sixth form is in line with the national average. The first three students at this school took the 'A/S' level examination in design and technology in the year 2000. Two students gained a B grade and one was unsuccessful. In the current sixth form, many students are finding the rigour of the course very taxing, but are gaining well in analytical approaches to the work. Students achievements are satisfactory. There are larger groups taking the subject, which make discussions more meaningful and students are working well on challenging projects. Design sheets are generally well arranged and presented. Students know about impact and use colour, rendering techniques and information technology very successfully. By the end of Year 13, students have amassed skills in using most of the equipment available to them and produce good quality products. Since the last inspection, few students have taken 'A level' home economics, but results were usually above national expectations.

128. The response to design and technology is very good. Most pupils enter the rooms cheerfully and settle to work speedily. They are attentive, listen well to instruction and show interest in their tasks and the demonstrations. During formal introductions, pupils make pertinent comments and answer questions politely, but only the higher-attaining pupils ask them. Most pupils enjoy practical work more than theory, but they all understand the need to be well informed and prepared. During lessons, pupils keep busy as most of them use their support booklets sensibly. Concentration levels are generally high and even when they encounter difficulties, pupils persevere well before asking for help. A few pupils try to help others if the teacher is busy, showing mature attitudes and very good relationships. Behaviour is very good. Pupils know the rules, wait turns when necessary, share fairly and behave very sensibly in practical work areas. They appreciate help and often thank adults for helping them. Pupils also respect school property and the items on display. During the inspection, pupils were proud to show their finished work, which indicates that they enjoyed it and many

were very generous in sharing their food products. Pupils usually complete their homework and hand it in on time.

129. The qualities of teaching and learning are very good. Teaching is good in Key Stage 4 and very good in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. It is consistently very good in Years 9, 12 and 13. The main strengths of the department are in the very high expectations that teachers have for the pupils, the very detailed planning and preparation for lessons and the careful selection and use of resources. Teachers try to make the topics and modules enjoyable. Pupils learn effectively as they are well challenged and they gain good knowledge and understanding. Teachers' subject knowledge is high. They are good demonstrators and successfully pass on appropriate craft skills to the pupils. They pitch language well so that pupils understand what they have to do and this also helps them to gain correct vocabulary. In many lessons, teachers increase pupils' numeracy skills by introducing concepts of time, formulae and accuracy in weighing and measurement. During lessons, pupils have enough time for their own work and the one-to-one help is very beneficial. It helps pupils who are struggling, encourages the less-confident pupils, including those with special educational needs, and ensures that the higher-attaining pupils are attempting higher-level tasks. Teachers mark pupils work carefully and comments on work usually indicate where it is good and where improvement is required. Pupils are left in no doubt about the quality of their work and the degree of effort made. Marking and assessment of work, however, are better in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3. When special needs support is available in class, pupils benefit from the close attention and they make good progress. Technical support is very good.

130. Leadership of the department is very good. The head of the department has been in post for little more than a year but has already had a significant impact upon the morale of the staff, the standards of work and the quality of planning. All the department staff feel that they are valued and meetings are held regularly to improve work modules and record pupils' attainment. These meetings also check that pupils are making the required amount and rate of progress. The development plan focuses on raising targets, introducing more work on systems and control and strengthening the use of information and communication technology.

131. The department has made a very good response to the comments made in the last inspection report. Standards are higher at Key Stages 3 and 4 and the scheme of work is now well mapped to the programme of assignments and the National Curriculum statements of attainment. Independent learning is promoted effectively, as the department has introduced booklets for all pupils on each module of work. Pupils use the booklets in class or may use them when doing extra work or homework. The sets of booklets are suitably matched to pupils' individual learning needs. Accommodation is vastly improved, as there is now a well-appointed technology centre. Display and storage do not now present problems. There are more and better computers and a wider range of books and resources. In addition to the improvements, there have been significant changes. The curriculum is now broader as it encompasses systems and control and greater use of information and communication technology, and the courses have been extended for the sixth form to include 'A/S' level and the Cisco Networking Academies programme. The latter has gained national recognition and this department is one of only a few in the country to offer a course of this type.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

132. This is a very well led department and good progress has been made since the last inspection in 1995. In 1999, GCSE results were well above the national average for all pupils and also above the average for similar schools. Pupils achieved better results in geography than in all but one other subject. In 2000, the percentage of pupils gaining the higher A\*-C

grades improved by five percent over 1999 and all pupils gained a grade. At 'A level' results in 1999 were well below the national average for higher A/B grades but above for all grades A-E. Results improved in 2000 and with a group of 16 students attainment at the higher and overall grades was broadly in line with all schools nationally. Over recent years 'A level' results at the higher grades, have been consistently higher than those recorded in 1999.

133. In 1999, attainment was above the national average by the end of Year 9. From observations in lessons and books this is also true of the current year 9. This represents good progress across the three years in relation to the level of achievement on entry in Year 7. Pupils continue to show a keen interest in the subject. Listening skills are well developed and a significant number of pupils write accurately, in a range of formats. Graphical, mapping and diagrammatic skills are good, particularly in the case of higher attaining pupils, where they are very good. They are able to carry out enquiry tasks on the themes and places they study. This was observed in lessons on the size and function of settlements and in follow up work to field study in Evesham. By the end of Year 11, standards in June 2000, were above the national average for similar schools. From the inspection of the current Year 11 pupils' work there are similar levels of attainment being achieved. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 possess good enquiry and independent learning skill, for example, in exploring the economic and environmental effects of tourism in Kenya and Costa Rica and in a unit on changing patterns in farming. All pupils are making good progress, in relation to standards achieved by the end of Year 9. Pupils in all years, use their computer skills well to develop their knowledge and understanding of the subject. Attainment in the sixth form 'A level' course was broadly in line with the national average for all pupils in 2000. From observations of lessons and books, this is also the case in the current year 13. Attainment in Year 12 is above expectation for this stage in the course. Students are able to use statistical models and show satisfactory understanding of topics covered so far. They are generally confident speakers and are prepared to discuss issues in class. Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as a second language make good progress against their targets, especially when supported.

134. Teaching overall is good with some very good practice. Lesson planning is thorough and clear aims are set and communicated to pupils and this leads to good learning. Teachers' expectations are high and lessons are conducted at a good pace. Attention is given to developing independent learning and thinking skills. A good example was seen in Year 9, where lower attaining pupils, working in groups, used a sorting exercise to explore redevelopment of inner city areas. Methods used encourage pupils to ask geographical questions and use subject language accurately such as in lessons on the function of settlements and the north south divide in Great Britain. Classroom management is good and combined with very positive attitudes from pupils, pupils achieve well in lessons across all years. Appropriate tasks are set for pupils with special educational needs which result in good progress. Pupils are given a good introduction to a range of different countries which, enables them to explore themes and geographical theories, gaining understanding of the relationships between physical and human factors. Very good use is made of computers to help pupils to gather, analyse and present information. Good examples of using mapping software were seen in Year 7 work. In Year 8, pupils use the Internet to gain access to local maps, and spreadsheets are used in Year 9 to analyse data and produce graphs in the tropical rainfall unit. Marking is thorough and comments give pupils good guidance on how to improve. Effective use is also made of National Curriculum grades to inform pupils of the standards they are achieving and how they can improve. Good use is made of field work activities in all years

and these provides opportunities for pupils to see the links between theory and practice. The quality of teaching combined with good responses from a significant number of pupils, has a positive influence on progress and achievement.



135. Geography is very well organised and managed. Good improvements have been made since the last inspection, particularly in the use of information and communication technology as a tool to improve geographical knowledge and understanding. Pupils are also now the involved in the planning and assessment of their own learning. There is very clear direction and leadership and the department works very well as a team. This combined with a very good scheme of work, has a beneficial influence on pupils' learning. Assessment procedures are very good and effective use is made of assessment data to plan lessons. Some monitoring of teaching takes place and planning for the future is thorough. To meet the aims of the school development plan additional use of the local area for practical enquiry activities and the increased monitoring of teaching and sharing good practice are needed.

## **HISTORY**

136. Recent GCSE A\*-C grades have been consistently above the national average with the 1999 results at 68 per cent. Results in the year 2000 sustained the high standard. More pupils now attain the higher grades. When compared with other GCSE subjects within the school history results have been close to the average. Recent A\*-G results have been above the national position. The recent GCE 'A level' results have shown improvement, with all students gaining a pass grade, with the exception of the 1999 results when they were well below the national average. However, few attain the higher grades.

137. Most pupils attain levels that are broadly in line with the national average at the end of Key Stage 3 and above it at the end of Key Stage 4. In the sixth form standards are close to the national average. By the end of Year 9, pupils have a good grounding in historical skills. They have a sound overview and understanding of the main events of the periods studied and their knowledge of chronology is satisfactory. Pupils demonstrate an ability to identify the nature of source material well. Progress overall at Key Stage 3 is good given prior attainment levels. Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language have inadequate additional support but their progress is satisfactory due to the considerable help and guidance provided by their teachers. By the end of Year 11, pupil's skill in using historical evidence is well developed and they are generally confident in undertaking historical enquiry. Most analyse and interpret sources well but critical evaluation in a wider context is a weakness. Progress at Key Stage 4 is good. Sixth form students organise themselves reasonably well in Year 12 and Year 13. They generally have a sound grasp of historical concepts. Progress overall is sound.

138. Teaching overall is good in all key stages. Teachers are committed, caring and manage and control pupils well. The best teaching has clear and manageable aims shared with pupils so that learning requirements are clearly understood. It has detailed and imaginative planning which ensures that presentations are lively, interesting and challenging and develops pupils' interest in the topic taught. In the best lessons there is a variety of teaching methods and practical involvement that meet the needs of pupils. Teaching is well structured and focused with staff having a secure knowledge of the subject. For example - in a Year 12 lesson where students were required to use their knowledge of the legacy of Elizabeth 1, in assessing the financial problems that James experienced in 1603. The use of visual aids, for example in a Year 9 lesson clarified lesson aims and had a significant positive impact on the quality of pupils learning.

139. However, teaching is occasionally too teacher directed with insufficient opportunities for pupils to participate in individual or group activity. Teachers strive too hard to inform pupils when an enquiry approach would better allow pupils to develop learning skills and personal understanding. The regular testing of understanding at the end of lessons ensures learning is effective. There is a limited use of visual aids using maps, films, slides and the over head projector to provide more variety and stimulation in lessons. Literacy skills are sound while numeracy skills are generally well used within the course. Fieldwork provided greatly enriches pupils' study. However, the use of information and communication technology skills is inadequate. Priority needs to be given to establishing a coherent programme of information and communication technology skills suitably linked to curriculum themes which ensure progression over Key Stages 3 and 4.

140. Pupils' attitude to learning is mostly positive and many display a real interest and enjoyment in their work. They work conscientiously and across the attainment range respond positively to teaching. Behaviour is good. Constructive relationships are established between pupils and their teachers that have a very positive effect on pupils' progress. Pupils across ethnic groups, relate very well to each other in class. Pupils' individual responses to questions are variable.

141. The department is soundly managed, and professionally competent. Documentation is good with a clear focus. Best practice needs sharing within the department. Day to day, marking is good and at Key Stage 4 comments are often very helpful in guiding pupils learning and has a noticeable effect on pupils' development and progress. Closer targeting of marginal grade C/D pupils should further improve the department's good GCSE results. There is a lack of evaluation for the department's development plan. There is currently no formal monitoring and evaluation of the impact of teaching on pupils learning. Resources are generally satisfactory but there are some serious shortfalls such as the need for a textbook for each pupil studying for their GCSE examinations. There is a lack of basic teaching equipment such as an overhead projector and a lack of access to computers.

142. The department has successfully tackled concerns raised at the previous inspection with regard to the standardising and monitoring of assessment. However, information and communication technology has been little improved although areas of possible application have been identified. Standards of high attainment in external examinations have been sustained.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

143. Taken as a whole, standards achieved by pupils currently approaching the end of Key Stage 3 in information and communication technology are in line with the standards expected nationally. In 1999, 71 per cent of pupils in Key Stage 3 achieved teacher assessments of level 5 or above in information technology. In 2000 this figure fell to only 40 per cent of Key Stage 3 pupils achieving teacher assessments in information technology of level 5 or above.

144. Attainment in information and communication technology at the end of Key Stage 4 is well below the national average. Against an upward trend in the school's GCSE performance, results in information technology have been disappointing. In the year 2000, 17 per cent of pupils achieved grade A\* to C on the GCSE short course, and only 40 per cent on the full course. The previous year, those had been 10 per cent and 26 per cent respectively. Although

there is therefore some upward movement of grades, they remain well below the examination results in other subjects and well below the national average over the last four years.

145. Pupils come from over fifty different primary schools, so the quality of experience in information technology varies widely, as does prior access to resources. But although many pupils start from a low base line, progress in raising standards has not kept pace with rising standards nationally. The school is tackling those issues as a matter of urgency.

146. Published statistics identify historic, not current outcomes. Staff changes at senior level in the department, the creation of well formulated development plans, the high standards of teaching observed during the inspection and the allocation of both computers and staffing resources indicate the commitment to raise standards. Standards of achievement as reflected in the work seen and lessons observed, with evidence of a wide ranging use of information technology across the curriculum, indicate the success with which standards in information and communication technology are currently being driven upwards.

147. In the work seen during the inspection, pupils at the age of 14 achieve in line with the levels expected nationally and this represents satisfactory progress given their levels of attainment on joining the school. They cover a range of skills and use a variety of software packages in their lessons. They are able to use desktop publishing software, spreadsheets, databases and cover aspects of control technology within their design and technology lessons. They search for information using both CD ROM as well as the Internet. In art, images are generated through the use of scanners and digital cameras. There is extensive computer and software use in geography and mathematics, where students were observed using spreadsheets to generate random numbers and scattergrams, and in design and technology - both in control technology and in design.

148. Pupils at all levels of attainment achieve basic competence in the skills covered in specific information technology lessons, with higher attaining pupils being able to show greater depth in their understanding. An example of this is in the use of spreadsheets, where all pupils are able to set up a spreadsheet, enter data and use formula to calculate results, with higher attaining pupils being able to explore the results of their calculations further by varying the data they are using. Pupils are able to explain how the variables they use in their data affect the end result of their calculations.

149. Standards of achievement are satisfactory. Good application of a database program was seen in a project involving Year 11 GNVQ pupils in setting up tables identifying the relevant information needed by job applicants. Pupils entered the details and were able to demonstrate how this information can be retrieved. Higher attaining pupils were able to view and present the information in different formats, including the creation of pie and bar charts. As part of their information technology lessons, Year 9 pupils used databases to search information on a variety of careers. These lessons were supportive to pupils, increasing their knowledge about a range of careers and enabling them to make realistic considerations about their own future opportunities. Pupils at all levels of attainment benefited from this investigation work and were able to talk confidently about their findings.

150. Higher attaining pupils are able to produce clear, well set out word processing. Lower attaining pupils, with teacher help, make good progress. Pupils with special educational needs are meeting to a satisfactory degree the targets set for them by their teachers. Pupils with English as an additional language make satisfactory progress.

151. The attainment of students working towards 'AS' or 'A Level' examinations in information and communication technology is broadly in line with expectation for those courses. Although Year 13 students have serious problems with the quantity of course work produced last year, current staff in the department are contributing additional time and effort to tackle this deficit.

152. Students on the Year 12 programme used good internet research skills to trawl for raw data which their projects would transform to information, making skilled use too of graphic and design software. Working to a design cycle Year 13 'A Level' candidates were able to use hypermedia systems in the design and production of a multimedia on-line tutorial for use in a retail context.

153. GNVQ programmes now begin in Year 9. Promising links with another institution should allow pupils access to "real world" applications of information and communication technology in industrial management and control, while there are training opportunities both for specialist staff and those from other departments. The school is working to derive the maximum benefit from this link.

154. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers show a high level of planning and preparation and are well-organised for their lessons. In most lessons there are clear objectives that support the pupils in their learning. Teachers explain the technical language of the subject and encourage students to use it correctly. This is particularly important where there are pupils with lower than average reading skills who benefit from this opportunity to extend their vocabulary in the subject. Constant self-evaluation of ongoing work is part of the GNVQ culture, but students on other courses and year groups are also encouraged in rigorous evaluation of their work. Year 10 GNVQ students were required to produce advertising copy and design, and to evaluate each others' work in pairs and small groups.

155. In all the lessons observed, relations between staff and pupils were consistently good. Attitudes and behaviour were consistently good or better, with the very few instances of challenging behaviour quickly and tactfully tackled. Pupils took good care of the equipment, treating the resources with appropriate respect, but familiar and comfortable in their use of the technology. However the lack of keyboard skills was a serious weakness throughout the age ranges, presenting a formidable barrier to the most speedy and effective use of the technology.

156. Management of the department has recently been strengthened on a temporary basis. A good start has been made on schemes of work for the teaching of discrete information and communication technology, as well as larger plans mapping its specified use in other areas of the National Curriculum. Not all subjects make full use of information and communication technology to support learning.

157. The school has made progress in improving the facilities available to pupils. Modern computers have been acquired since the last inspection, mini suites have been created in the mathematics department, the sixth form centre and the open learning centre. The cabling infrastructure for the school has been greatly improved allowing networked access to terminals across the site. Information and communication technology is effectively used in the school's timetabling and administration. However there is a mismatch between the equipment available to the special educational needs department and sophisticated learning software which it is consequently unable to use. Lack of equipment in the science area inhibits full

conformity to statutory requirements, although new network cabling should allow this issue to be tackled shortly. None of the information and communication technology rooms are equipped to let teachers demonstrate to the whole class (for example using a projector-monitor), and there is a shortage of textbook resources. Overall the number of computers is below the national average for a school of this size.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

158. All pupils study French or German in Years 7-9. In Year 8, 4 classes out of 6 also do the language they did not begin in Year 7. They then choose one or two of the languages they have learned for Years 10 and 11. In recent years GCSE results in French have varied: slightly below national standards in 1998 and 2000, but well above in 1999. GCSE results in German were well above in all three years. French results were slightly lower than in similar schools in 1998 and 2000, but well above in 1999. Results are also lower than in most other subjects in the school in 1998 and 2000, but higher in 1999. German results have been higher than in similar schools and higher than most other subjects in the school.

159. A number of able pupils in Year 9 have reached level 5 in French in listening, speaking, reading and writing, and general levels are slightly above national standards. Throughout the school pupils are stronger in listening, speaking, and reading, and weaker in writing. When speaking, pupils in a Year 12 French were able to talk in detail about their past lives, current activities, and plans for future education and careers. When listening, pupils in a Year 10 German class could understand different subjects on a school timetable. When reading letters from young German people on the overhead projector, pupils in a Year 7 class were able to understand details about their personal lives. When writing, pupils in a Year 9 French class were able to write interesting accounts of their holidays. Overall, there is a satisfactory amount of written exercises and sustained writing: however, pupils make unnecessary errors in grammar and spelling. Pupils do not check their written work carefully enough. There are no significant variations between pupils of different ethnicity, background, nor ability. Pupils have regular reading sessions: these contribute to their general literacy, and develop their French and German skills and knowledge, including the use of dictionaries. However, insufficient use of paired work, and the errors pupils make in written work, are preventing pupils from achieving higher standards. Pupils spend most of their time using the foreign language in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Pupils only use numbers occasionally. Pupils have had limited access to computers, but will use them when they have the opportunity.

160. The department has successfully tackled almost all the issues raised in the last inspection report. Pupils are more independent in learning and using French and German for speaking and writing. More resources have been provided, and more time has been given for the second foreign language. However, more training and resources for information and communication technology are needed.

161. The overall quality of teaching is good. In Key Stages 3 and 4 the quality of teaching is at least good, and often very good and in the sixth form it is good. The quality of teaching is improving standards and ensures pupils make at least satisfactory progress. Teachers plan a sequence of activities, are proficient in French and German, project their voices clearly, and have good accents in French and German. They use the foreign languages for parts of the lesson, but sometimes use too much English. Some teachers use overhead projectors well.

They exploit other resources effectively to increase learning. Standards of discipline are generally good, but a few pupils find it difficult to concentrate sufficiently. Time is used well, and teachers are good at encouraging oral work in pairs. Teachers display pupils' work, maps, posters, and other authentic material, which increase the students' knowledge of the language and countries concerned. Pupils' work is assessed regularly, and results inform subsequent teaching. Appropriate homework is set regularly. The teaching of those with special needs is good, and meets the needs of these pupils well. Teachers manage classes well.

162. Almost all pupils behave well. They show interest in their work, sustain their concentration, and develop good study skills. Their response is at least good and often very good in Key Stages 3 and 4, and very good post-16. Many pupils show an obvious sense of enjoyment in lessons. They work well in pairs, and sometimes have opportunities to use their initiative in creating role plays and working independently. Their positive attitudes enable them to improve their performance. However, a few pupils find it difficult to concentrate and achieve their potential. Most pupils, including the most and least able and those with special educational needs, make good progress in lessons at both key stages.

163. The organisation of the curriculum meets statutory requirements. The head of modern languages monitors the progress of pupils in French and German. The department is very well led and organised, has prioritised development plans, and works well as a team. The department lacks sufficient textbooks, magazines, computer software, overhead projectors, and curtains. Visits to France and Germany encourage personal responsibility, and improve language competence. The textbooks and other materials used, together with the visits abroad, help develop awareness of the diversity and richness of other cultures. The quality of most teaching, the attitudes of most pupils, visits abroad, and the leadership of the head of modern languages have positive effects on standards.

## **MUSIC**

164. Since the previous inspection, standards in music have declined due largely to staffing problems over the last year. These difficulties have now been resolved with the appointment this term of a teacher in charge of the subject. A secure start has already been made, and there are further plans to rebuild and promote the subject to be successful in its own right, and as part of the school's extensive programme of performing arts, with concerts and other musical events. At present, music is taught only to pupils up to the age of 14, and it is important that GCSE courses are re-introduced as soon as possible. A wide range of music-making activities, however, attracts pupils of all ages, and is contributing very effectively to their social and cultural development. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory.

165. Although there are no pupils at present involved in GCSE music courses, good results were maintained over the previous two years that matched national subject averages for A\*-C grades. These pupils achieved high standards, performing expressively both as soloists and ensemble players. Their compositions were properly structured and enhanced by written scores that reflected individual styles and musical interests effectively.

166. The attainment of pupils aged 14 is about average compared to the expectations of the National Curriculum. Standards of achievement in playing and listening to music are, at present, above average in Year 7, and not high enough in composing and performing in Years 8 and 9. Although pupils by this age have improved their knowledge of the basic elements of

music as a language, their composing and performing skills remain rudimentary generally. Most can construct short pieces that combine pitch and rhythm with varying degrees of success, and a few incorporate the use of chords successfully. They read and adapt music in a variety of ways and a significant number play expressively and with rhythmic control. This was particularly evident in a Year 7 lesson where rhythms were being combined in complex patterns and played with some considerable flair to make a substantial composition played by the whole class.



167. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons are well planned and taught competently to focus strongly on practical musical objectives. Pupils are taught from the outset how to describe the music they are learning in appropriate musical terms. They understand the relationship between the music they hear and that which they compose. For example, a Year 7 class was able to recognise and appreciate the use of repetitive rhythms in part of Haydn's Clock Symphony after composing similar short sequences of their own. Pupils use a range of keyboard and percussion instruments to compose and perform, and are creatively productive. Their attitude to exploring and sharing musical ideas with instruments is enthusiastic and collaborative. Behaviour is generally good. The few pupils in Years 8 and 9, whose behaviour and concentration do not live up to the high standards set by the majority, need more help to be shown exactly what is expected of them musically. The department is aware of the general need to revive and improve standards of attainment at Key Stage 3. Procedures for assessing pupils' work were an issue in the previous inspection. The opportunity now provided by the new National Curriculum to introduce levels of attainment is being pursued by the department. All pupils need to know the musical criteria by which their work will be marked and assessed.

168. There is very good provision for the significant number of pupils who wish to learn to play other instruments. At the time of the inspection, about 15 per cent of the school were having free lessons from a team of nine visiting teachers. A wide range of extra-curricular musical activities is generally well supported. The school makes good provision for musically talented pupils and the strong social bonding in groups like the chamber choir and the gospel choir is impressive.

169. The subject is well managed and efficiently run as part of the performing arts department. Since the previous inspection, the standard of accommodation has improved, and now includes three practice rooms and adequate storage facilities. Resources are satisfactory, but the inclusion of work with computers is yet to be introduced. In particular, there are no CD-ROMs to enhance the teaching of music.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

170. The school has not entered pupils for GCSE or 'A level' examinations in recent years in either physical education or dance. GCSE courses in both subjects have now been introduced. No physical education is offered in the sixth form.

171. Evidence of good standards of performance is apparent in the successes of teams and individuals at local and county level, particularly in netball, with one girl winning a national championship in athletics. In the work seen during the inspection, standards of attainment in the skills of planning, performance and evaluation are satisfactory and match the national expectation for pupils at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. In both key stages, good standards of attainment are achieved in netball, dance and most gymnastics classes. Attainment is lower in hockey where learning is limited. At Key Stage 4, attainment in options such as volley ball and badminton is below average compared with national standards because pupils have had only limited experience of these games. Despite this, very good progress was observed in a Year 10 volleyball class. Pupils have a good understanding of how to warm up before different kinds of exercise. They listen carefully to teachers and each other and observe demonstrations attentively with good understanding. They are able to identify significant points so that their understanding increases and their performances improve. Because they

know that they are judged against their own potential rather than an absolute standard, pupils of all abilities are confident in practising skills and exploring possibilities. They work together well in groups to plan and perform a sequence of movements using a beam in gymnastics or to extend a dance sequence. Particularly in Years 7 and 8, but rarely elsewhere outside examination groups where it is a strength, do pupils make appropriate use of technical language when discussing their work. A Year 7, pupil correctly identified the need for 'a stronger dynamic' in a dance routine and GCSE candidates could explain important features of filmed performances. At both key stages, pupils have a sensible awareness of safety considerations.

172. Achievement during lessons and over time is good at both key stages because the good foundation established in Year 7 is systematically reinforced and progressively built upon in accordance with well designed schemes of work. Progress is good because pupils are well motivated, enjoy their work and benefit from good teaching.

173. Pupils at all levels of attainment are appropriately challenged and supported by teachers who understand their different needs and capabilities. Pupils with significant physical limitations are shown how activities can be modified, for example in gymnastics. Pupils with special educational needs and English as an additional language are appropriately supported and make good progress. Achievement in lessons, though still satisfactory, is reduced when pupils' enthusiasm is not matched by sustained concentration. This is apparent in some Year 9 classes but not evident elsewhere. In almost all lessons, pupils share the high expectations of teachers of their effort, achievement and behaviour. The good quality of relationships pupils have with teachers and each other contributes significantly to the good quality of their learning. They know that although expectations are high, their performances will be judged in a supportive manner.

174. The quality of teaching is good. It is often very good, sometimes excellent and never less than satisfactory. The quality of pupils' learning matches the quality of teaching. Teachers have good levels of subject knowledge across a wide range of activities. These are respected and in the case of their demonstrations sometimes applauded by pupils. Lessons are well constructed, divided into linked units with smooth transitions and conducted at a brisk pace, often with challenging time limits. Thus, pupils' interest, concentration and effort are sustained. Teachers link the content of lessons to previous and future work so that its relevance is understood. Teachers consistently provide opportunities for pupils to contribute to their learning. They use questions skilfully both to confirm and to extend understanding. They constantly expect pupils to make choices in games and to explore possibilities as they compose performances in dance, gymnastics and aerobics. Pupils at all levels of attainment respond positively to the opportunities and challenges offered them so that they perform at the upper extreme of their individual range of skills and make good progress. Teachers are careful to ensure that pupils have a good balance of opportunities to plan, perform and evaluate and understand the value of these skills and how they relate to each other.

175. The work of the department benefits from effective leadership and membership of the performing arts faculty. Because teachers share aims and values, the subject makes a powerful contribution to the achievement of the school's aims for its pupils especially by promoting the development of personal confidence, social skills in working with others, and encouraging high aspiration together with the ability to make appropriate choices. The range of indoor accommodation is good with a sports hall, gymnasium and dance studio. The varnish on the

gymnasium floor is cracked and pitted and the studio would benefit from the provision of curtains.

### ***Dance***

176. Dance is taught outside the physical education department but within the performing arts faculty. At Key Stage 3, it makes an important contribution to pupils' experience of a broad and balanced curriculum for physical education. At Key Stage 4, it is taught as an element of performing arts and also as a single subject. In the case of the latter, lessons are currently held after school for pupils in Years 10 and 11, all of whom will take GCSE at the end of this year. Although the subject was reintroduced to the curriculum as recently as the start of the previous school year, attainment already matches and often exceeds standards achieved nationally. The quality of teaching is very good and sometimes excellent and this is matched by the quality of learning. Particular strengths of pupils' work are evident in Year 7 classes and dance club where pupils are already able to work in unison and cannon. They understand the importance of levels and can devise and perform complex sequences of movement and evaluate the strengths of their own work and that of others. More able pupils preparing for GCSE demonstrate ambition, originality and very good levels of skill in composing performances and are well able to communicate with an audience.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

177. No pupils were entered for GCSE examinations in 1999 or 2000 and there were no 'A level' courses. At the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' attainment is in line with the average for pupils of that age. Their knowledge and understanding of Christianity is average. They know the main beliefs associated with Christianity. They understand that belief affects behaviour but cannot explain in detail how Christian belief affects the behaviour and attitudes of believers. Their knowledge and understanding of Judaism is average. They can name some of the key figures in Judaism, such as Abraham and Moses, and some of the main Jewish festivals. Their understanding of the significance of 'covenant' is below average and whilst they can draw meaning from stories they find it difficult to do so from symbols and artefacts. Their skills of analysis and interpretation are below average but their ability to empathise with others and understand the world through the eyes of others are above average. For instance pupils in Year 9 could empathise with and understand the feelings of Mary and her part in the Nativity story.

178. The attainment of pupils in Year 7 is well below average but they make satisfactory progress through Years 8 and 9 adding to their knowledge and understanding of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. In Year 7 pupils struggled to identify the main beliefs of Christianity but in a Year 9 lesson they learned the major festivals of the Christian calendar and were able to identify the activities associated with them. The achievement of pupils with special educational needs is good throughout Years 7, 8 and 9. With the additional support given them they make good progress.

179. In Key Stage 4 there are two groups of pupils – a small group who take a GCSE course and the majority who take the general course. Overall attainment is below average for pupils of this age. For GCSE pupils the attainment of pupils at the end of the key stage is average for their age. For the majority who take the general course their attainment is well below average for their age. GCSE pupils make consistent gains in their knowledge and understanding of Christianity and Judaism. In a Year 11 class pupils were able to identify the

five pillars of Islam and to understand the significance of Hajj for a Muslim. In Year 10 they can contrast and compare marriage for a Muslim and a Christian. In both Year 10 and 11 they are able to apply their knowledge of Christianity and Islam to moral issues such as marriage and euthanasia.

180. For the majority of pupils taking the general course, whilst opportunities are given to discuss moral and social issues, their lack of knowledge and understanding of Christianity, Judaism and Islam mean they have difficulty in understanding the significance of these issues for believers. Religious education modules are included in sixth form general studies and there is an element within the BTEC. child development course but there was insufficient evidence to form a judgement on the attainment of students in the sixth form.

181. The progress of pupils across Key Stage 3 is good. They come into the school with a well below average level of knowledge and understanding but make steady progress up to the end of Key Stage 3. The small group of GCSE pupils continue to make good progress across Key Stage 4 but the majority of pupils lose continuity and progression during Key Stage 4 due to the lack of time and the timetabling arrangements for them. This means that progress is unsatisfactory for the majority of pupils at this key stage. They do not add to their knowledge and understanding of Christianity or the other main religions in any systematic way. Their skills of reflection, interpretation and evaluation of religious beliefs and values remain well below average. The progress of pupils with special educational needs, English as an additional language and for gifted pupils is good at Key Stage 3 and in the GCSE group at Key Stage 4. The majority of the rest of pupils make poor progress at Key Stage 4.

182. The attitudes and behaviour of pupils at both key stages is good. They are keen to learn. They often come into lessons and immediately consult their books for the marks given them and respond to teachers' comments and suggestions for improving their achievements. They respond well to questions and take a keen interest in their learning. Their behaviour is good and their attitude to what they are being taught is very good. They work well together on projects and their work is generally well-presented.

183. The quality of teaching at both Key Stages 3 and 4 is good. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Where teaching is good, teachers form good relationships with pupils and so pupils want to do well. The pace of lessons is good and the maximum time available is used well. Lessons are well planned and prepared and assessment of pupils' work is thorough and consistent. Both pupils with special educational needs and gifted pupils are challenged to fulfil their potential. Learning objectives are very clear and pupils know exactly what they are expected to learn. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good and this means that pupils feel secure to ask questions and improve their knowledge and understanding. Teachers' expectations of behaviour and work are high. Pupils are given great encouragement and marks in books are accompanied by constructive comments that enable pupils to set future achievable targets for themselves. Very good records are kept of pupils' attainment and progress and these are used to develop the schemes of work. On just a few occasions discussions did not include the application of religious belief to moral issues. There is a heavy emphasis on learning about religion rather than learning from it.

184. The quality and range of curriculum opportunities at Key Stage 3 are very good. At Key Stage 4 they are unsatisfactory. Insufficient time is allocated for progress and achievement to be maintained for most pupils. The way the subject is timetable means that there is no real continuity and progression at this key stage and many pupils are under-achieving.

185. Religious education makes a significant contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at Key Stage 3 but this is not continued into Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 3 opportunities are given to discuss and evaluate pupils' own beliefs and values and to compare them with those of others. They are able to consider moral issues and the responses of religious believers to them. Opportunities to discover and learn from other cultures are given through the study of Judaism and Islam in particular. At Key Stage 4 the unsatisfactory arrangements for religious education mean that pupils' spiritual development is hampered by lack of time and the intermittent nature of the timetable provision.

186. There are few links with local Churches or other places of worship and the local community is not effectively used as a resource.

187. Leadership of the department is good. The handbook is clear and comprehensive and this forms the basis for the good standards that are apparent throughout the department. Resources are currently barely adequate for the existing curriculum. Many books are old and out-dated and do not reflect the changes that have taken place in the subject over the past five years. No provision is made for all pupils to follow a short GCSE course or resources to accomplish this.

188. In general the school has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection but it still does not provide sufficient time for religious education at Key Stage 4. Teaching continues to be good and attainment at Key Stage 3 has remains average for pupils of that age. At the time of the previous inspection GCSE examination results were significantly above the national average. There are currently only a very small number of pupils taking GCSE examinations.