

# **INSPECTION REPORT**

## **BALCARRAS SCHOOL**

East End Road  
Charlton Kings  
Cheltenham  
Gloucestershire  
GL53 8QF

LEA area: Gloucestershire

Unique reference number: 115759

Headteacher: Mr Christopher Healy

Reporting inspector: Val Lynch  
1475

Dates of inspection: 6<sup>th</sup> – 9th November 2000

Inspection number: 223998

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Foundation

Age range of pupils: 11 - 18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Balcarras School  
East End Road  
Charlton Kings  
Cheltenham  
Gloucestershire

Postcode: GL53 8QF

Telephone number: 01242 515881

Fax number: 01242 250620

Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr Peter Marsden

Date of previous inspection: 15 January 1996

# **INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM**

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Val Lynch (1475)	Registered inspector	Special educational needs	Characteristics How high are standards? How well is the school led and managed?
Catherine Hinds (10173)	Lay inspector		How high are standards? How well does the school care for its pupils and students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Allan Nicholl (2473)	Team inspector	Equal Opportunities English as an additional language	How well are pupils and students taught? How good are curricular and other opportunities?
Angela Fraser (10561)	Team inspector	Science	
Peter Bannon (30576)	Team inspector	Mathematics Numeracy	
Malcolm McGregor (18854)	Team inspector	Art Information Technology	
David Wasp (10895)	Team inspector	Religious Education	Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
Keith Smalley (3960)	Team inspector	History	
Daphne Nicholl (23569)	Team inspector	Modern Foreign Languages	
Henry Moreton (10782)	Team inspector	English Literacy	
Sue Jones (22501)	Team inspector	Music	
Malcolm Butterworth (13217)	Team inspector	Physical Education	
John Carnaghan (1352)	Team inspector	Geography	
Brian Munden (2495)	Team inspector	Design & Technology	

The inspection contractor was:

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The Office for Standards in Education  
Alexandra House, 33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Balcarras School is a foundation school situated in Charlton Kings, on the eastern outskirts of Cheltenham. It provides education for pupils and students of all abilities from age 11 to 18, having opened a sixth form and become a technology college in 1998. The school is a similar size to other secondary schools and has grown considerably over the last five years as its popularity has increased and with the addition of the sixth form. Some of the higher attaining pupils who could attend the school go instead to nearby grammar or independent schools. Nevertheless, the school is very popular and more parents want to send their children to the school than there are places available.

The school has few ethnic minority pupils compared with the national average. An equally small number of pupils have English as an additional language but they do not need additional support beyond that which the school provides. There are similar numbers of boys and girls both in the main school and the sixth form. Five per cent of pupils are known to be eligible for free school meals, which is well below the national average.

Key Stage 2 results for pupils who joined the school in September 2000 indicate that the attainment of these pupils is broadly average. Key Stage 2 results in the core subjects of English and mathematics are slightly above average for pupils gaining the expected Level 4, and in science they are in line with the national average. The percentage of pupils gaining the higher Level 5 in all three core subjects is in line with the national average.

Nine pupils, 1 per cent of the school, have a statement of special educational needs. This is below the national average. In total 16 per cent of pupils are on the special educational needs register. This is also below the national average.

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

This is a very good school. There have been impressive improvements since the previous inspection both in test and examination results and in what the school provides for its pupils and students. This is largely due to the excellent leadership provided by the governors and the headteacher and the high quality staff who work in the school. The school provides very good value for money.

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

- Test and examination results in all subjects are consistently well above the national average.
- Pupils and students of all abilities, including those with learning difficulties, make very good progress.
- Teaching is very good throughout the school and particularly in the sixth form.
- Pupils are always ready to learn and behave very well.
- Attendance is well above the national average and is particularly good in Years 10 and 11.
- Teachers and students have quickly established a successful sixth form.
- Leadership and management are very effective at all levels.

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

- The time available for Religious Education in Key Stage 4.
- The provision of a daily act of collective worship.

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

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

The school has made very good progress on the key issues identified by the previous inspection. The gaining of technology college status and the opening of the sixth form have significantly improved the learning experiences for pupils and students. The improvements made in strategic planning and monitoring and evaluation have led to systems and procedures being established that will ensure that improvements continue so that the school motto "From strength to strength" becomes a reality.

## 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
	1997	1998	1999	1999
Key Stage 3	A	A	A	B
GCSE examinations	B	B	A	B
A-levels/AS-levels	n/a	n/a	n/a	

**Key**

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

Results in tests taken by pupils when they are 14 in English, mathematics and science are always well above results in other schools. Over the last three years results have improved at a rate similar to that found in other schools. The school's results are compared nationally with a group of schools who have a similar percentage of free school meals. At 5 per cent the school is on the boundary between two such groups. Because some higher attaining pupils who could come to Balcarras choose to go elsewhere, the ability profile of pupils joining the school does not match what would be expected of a school in the group having up to 5 per cent free school meals. The inspection team, therefore, judges that a grade one higher than that given for national comparisons with similar schools best represents the school's achievements. Overall results for pupils aged 14 in 1999 were above those in similar schools. In 2000 the average points score was slightly less than in 1999. The school has collected and analysed data over the last three years to show that test results at the end of Key Stage 3 are slightly above what was predicted on the basis of what pupils could do when they joined the school at age 11.

Over the last five years the percentage of pupils gaining five or more passes at grades A\*-C in their GCSEs has been consistently above the national average. Improvements in results over the last five years have been greater than improvements nationally. In 1999 the percentage of pupils gaining five or more passes at grades A\*-G was also well above the national average and improved in 2000. In 1999 results in all subjects were significantly better than the national average and have remained high in 2000. As in Key Stage 3, the inspection team judge that a grade one higher than that given for national comparisons best represents the school's achievements in Key Stage 4 and that the GCSE results in 1999 compare well with the national data for schools of a similar kind. The results in 2000 for students in the sixth form were the first for the school and as yet no national comparisons exist.

Standards of work in all subjects in Key Stage 3 are good or better. Achievement in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory and is good for pupils with special educational needs. In Key Stage 4, standards of work seen were good or better in all subjects except in information and communications technology and religious education. In information and communications technology they are satisfactory but in religious education they are unsatisfactory because there is not enough time given to the subject. Achievement in Key Stage 4 is well above the achievement in schools with similar Key Stage 3 results. Pupils with special educational needs continue to achieve well because of the work done on basic literacy skills in Key Stage 3. In the sixth form students are making good progress in all subjects.

The school set challenging and realistic targets for 2000 and was very close to achieving its targets. Targets for 2001 are also challenging and realistic.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good: pupils and students are keen to come to school and eager to be involved in all school activities.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good: the quality of behaviour ensures that pupils and students can concentrate on their learning.
Personal development and relationships	Very good: the school is a harmonious community where young people become responsible and mature in their relationships.

Attendance	Very good, reflecting pupils' and students' commitment to school.
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Consistent very good behaviour, very good relationships and very good attendance mean that all pupils have a very positive and supportive environment in which to learn. It is one in which academic success and learning are appreciated and valued by both boys and girls.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

Teaching is now a strength of the school and leads directly to high levels of attainment. In the main school it is good in over 80 per cent of lessons and very good or excellent in 40 per cent of lessons. In the sixth form teaching is even better. In almost all lessons teaching is good and in almost 60 per cent of lessons it is very good or excellent. During the inspection no unsatisfactory teaching was seen. This is a great improvement since the previous inspection.

Teaching in English, mathematics and science and in many subjects is very good overall. All teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject and this enables them to provide an appropriate intellectual stimulus for pupils. There is sound long-term planning in all subjects that ensures pupils make very good progress in their learning. In almost all lessons teachers have high expectations of pupils' attainment and challenge them to do well and improve. Good use is made of time and resources and there is often a crisp pace in lessons. As a result, pupils work hard. Homework is used well to support and extend pupils' understanding of work begun in class. In the sixth form the quality of teaching is consistently high. Teachers encourage independence and help students to begin to take charge of their own learning in preparation for higher education.

The teaching of pupils with special educational needs by specialist teachers in the individual learning support department is very good and sometimes it is quite outstanding. Very good use is made of information and communications technology to support the development of pupils' reading and spelling skills. Literacy and numeracy skills are well taught and used in all subjects.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good: the curriculum clearly meets the aims of the school and provides a wide range of learning opportunities for pupils and students.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good: pupils are well supported by the work done with them as individuals or in small groups to improve their basic skills. They also have all the learning opportunities available to other pupils.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good: pupils who have potential to do well are encouraged and do very well. Those that experience difficulties get the help they need.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good provision for moral and social development. Provision for cultural development is good and for spiritual development it is satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very good framework for the care of all pupils. Appropriate assessment arrangements are used well to support and guide pupils and students.

The school works closely with parents, who are generally very supportive of the school. The curriculum is a strength of the school and is kept regularly under review. However, there is not enough time for religious education in Key Stage 4 so the statutory requirements for this are not met.

The school cares well for pupils' and students' personal development and their academic progress.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. The leadership and management at all levels are committed to raising levels of attainment and have ensured that the school has made rapid and impressive improvements over the last four years.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Excellent: there is a very strong and experienced governing body who have been very appropriately involved in major decisions that affect the strategic direction of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good: there is an in-depth annual review of the school development plan and a very detailed analysis of examination results.
The strategic use of resources	Very good: there has been exemplary planning for the improvement of staffing, accommodation and resources, particularly to support the development of information and communications technology.

The headteacher provides outstanding leadership, supported by an exceptionally active and able governing body. He is also well supported by effective senior and middle managers and a high quality team of teaching and support staff.

The school is very good at applying best value principles. It compares its performance with other schools in Gloucestershire, not just in terms of examination results but also in terms of staffing and expenditure. It challenges itself to do even better and questions what it does in order to continue to improve. Teachers, pupils and parents are regularly consulted, as is the local education authority. Governors use competitive tendering for work to be done and always try to get as much as it can from the use of its finances.

## 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>Pupils and students like school.</li> <li>Pupils and students make good progress.</li> <li>The school has high expectations.</li> <li>The school helps children to become mature and responsible.</li> <li>The way the school is led and managed.</li> <li>They are comfortable to approach the school with questions or problems</li> </ul>	

There were 288 parents who replied to the parents' questionnaire and 53 parents attended the meeting with the Registered Inspector. Both the parents' questionnaire and the parents' meeting were very supportive of the school. Many appreciated the high expectations that the school had in terms of academic achievement and good attendance. Inspectors found that the high expectations were a significant feature of the school and created a climate in which it was acceptable to be successful. A few parents raised concerns about homework because on some nights there seemed to be too much and on other nights too little. During the inspection inspectors looked at pupils' planners and found that homework was set regularly and in most cases plenty of time was given if the task was beyond what could be done in one evening. A very small number of parents' expressed concern about the quality of information that is provided for them on how well their children are progressing. The inspection team found that this is an area where some small improvements could be made.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

- 1 Results in the national tests taken by pupils when they are 14 are well above the national average. In English, mathematics and science over the last three years these results have been consistently above or well above those for all schools. Results in mathematics and science in 2000 are better than those for 1999. In English, results in 2000 are lower than those in 1999 but are still above the national average. The percentage of pupils in science gaining Level 5<sup>1</sup>, the level expected for pupils at the age of 14, improved from 74 per cent to 79 per cent. In mathematics this improvement was from 79 per cent to 84 per cent. The percentages of pupils gaining the higher Level 6 in science increased significantly while there was a slight increase in this figure for mathematics. The percentage of pupils gaining the higher Level 6 in English was well below what was achieved in 1999 but remained well above the national average.
- 2 The school's results are compared nationally with those of schools who have a similar percentage of free school meals. At 5 per cent the school is on the boundary between two groups. Because some higher attaining pupils who could come to Balcarras choose to go elsewhere the ability profile of pupils joining the school does not match what would be expected of a school in the 0 to 5 per cent free school meals. The inspection team, therefore, judges that one grade higher than that given for national comparisons with similar schools best represents the school's achievements. The team thinks that overall the results for pupils aged 14 in 1999 were above those in similar schools. In 2000 the average points score was slightly less than in 1999. In 1999 results in English were very high when compared with similar schools and although they were lower in 2000 they were still broadly in line with similar schools. Results in mathematics in 1999 were better than in similar schools and in 2000, although the average points score increased very slightly, results were broadly in line with similar schools. In science results were broadly in line with similar schools but in 2000 they were above them.
- 3 The school has collected and analysed assessment information over the last three years. This shows that these test results from 1997 to 1999 were slightly above what could be predicted on the basis of pupils' attainment when they joined the school at age 11. The information also demonstrates that results in 2000 would not be as good as those in 1999. This was because pupils who took the tests in 1999 were working at levels slightly above average when they joined the school.
- 4 Over the last five years the percentage of pupils gaining five or more passes at grades A\*-C in GCSE examinations has been consistently above the national average. Results in 2000 were not as good as in 1999 when the percentage of pupils gaining five or more passes at grades A\*-C was an outstanding 71 per cent. However they were still better than those in 1998. The improvement in results over the last five years has been greater than improvements nationally. In 1999 the percentage of pupils gaining at least five passes at grades A\*-G was 96.9 per cent, which is above the national average. This figure improved to 98 per cent in 2000 and indicates a real achievement for lower attaining pupils and those with special

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<sup>1</sup> The National Curriculum has been written on the basis that pupils by the end of Key Stage 3, are expected to reach Level 5. If a pupil is attaining at Level 6 or 7 then he or she is reaching standards above that expected for a pupil of his or her age.

educational needs. In 1999 the average points score<sup>2</sup> was well above the national figure. Although the percentage of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades A\*-C fell in 2000, the average points score was very similar to last year's. So although there was a lower proportion of pupils gaining the national benchmark of 5 or more passes at grades A\*-C, the performance of lower and average attaining pupils was at least maintained if not improved. In 1999 results in all subjects were significantly better than the national average. Results in 2000 were similarly high.

- 5 As in Key Stage 3, the inspection team judge that a grade one higher than that given for national comparisons with similar schools best represents the school's achievements in Key Stage 4. GCSE results in 1999 compare well with the national data for schools of a similar kind. The percentage of pupils gaining passes at grades A\*-C was above that found in similar schools. The percentage gaining passes at grades A\*-G and the average points score were also both above the figures in similar schools.
- 6 The results in 2000 for students in the sixth form were the first for the school and as yet no national comparative data has been published. The school has already completed a very detailed analysis of these results for the GCE A-levels and GNVQs. This shows that students achieved an average points score of 16.3. The national average points score in 1999 was 17.9. However, many students took the examination for general studies in 1999 and if these results were included the average points score would be higher. In advanced courses leading to a GNVQ all students gained pass grades and 58 per cent gained merit awards and a further 30 per cent gained distinction awards.
- 7 By the age of 14 girls have generally done better than boys in English, mathematics and science. Over the last three years the differences have been similar to those found nationally. In 2000 boys did better than girls in science and mathematics. In GCSE examinations girls also do better than boys and again the differences are similar to the differences found nationally. Girls have consistently done better than boys over the last three years. It is interesting to note that boys do better than girls in art, a situation that does not reflect the national picture. Boys do particularly well in modern foreign languages. In 2000 test and examination results the gap between boys' and girls' results is smaller because boys' results are improving. Pupils with special educational needs do well and many gain GCSE accreditation. There are a few pupils with English as an additional language who do particularly well, as do the very small number of minority ethnic pupils, keeping up with and achieving as well as their peers.
- 8 Pupils' speaking and listening skills are good throughout the school and steadily improve over time. Pupils are given good opportunities to develop these skills in lessons and in a range of extra-curricular activities such as drama productions and public speaking competitions. Pupils' reading skills are good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and are better than expected for their ages, improving over time. Teachers make very good use of time at the start of most lessons giving all pupils opportunities to read and, above all, to develop an interest in books. Standards of writing are good throughout the school and are better than average for pupils of all attainments. Teachers' expectations of presentation are high and are developed through the excellent marking of pupils' work.

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<sup>2</sup> The average points score provides schools with a single statistic to compare the overall grades attained by their pupils with the grades attained by pupils in another school.

- 9 Standards of numeracy are good. The application of techniques from the National Numeracy Strategy in mathematics lessons throughout this stage has contributed to this. Good numeracy skills improve performance and are well used across a wide range of subjects, particularly science and design and technology. All pupils, including those with English as an additional language and those with special educational needs, have good levels of numeracy in relation to their general level of academic attainment. By the end of Year 13 standards of numeracy are good and often better. In physics, students are extremely confident in using formulae to solve equations. In GNVQ business, students make good use of spreadsheets to maintain profit and loss accounts. Numeracy skills improve appropriately as pupils progress through the school.
- 10 The school provides a basic grounding in the use and application of a range of software through some discrete teaching of information and communications technology at each key stage and in the sixth form. This is further developed in the subjects of the curriculum, particularly in science, design and technology, geography and history and sometimes in mathematics. This range of experiences that are well taught by staff ensures that standards overall in the use and application of information and communications technology are at least satisfactory and in many cases, particularly in the presentation of work, they are good. Standards in the use, graphical presentation and interpretation of data are good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form, particularly in science. The general picture across the school is one of good levels of competence that enable pupils to make effective use of computers to support their learning. There is good access to the Internet and the school has a very good open access policy for all computer rooms. This encourages the regular use of computers and the development of key skills particularly for independent study and research.
- 11 Standards of work seen in Key Stage 3 in history and modern foreign languages are very good. In religious education and music they are satisfactory. In all other subjects the standard of work seen was good. There was no unsatisfactory work in any subject. This is because teachers teach well and pupils want to learn. The achievements of pupils in lessons were judged to be satisfactory in all lessons and in four out of five lessons it was judged to be good. In two out of five lessons it was judged to be very good. A number of lessons where achievement was considered to be good was in small groups or one-to-one situations in the learning support department. These pupils, during Key Stage 3, make great gains in the basic skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening.
- 12 In Key Stage 4 standards of work seen were very good in history, modern foreign languages and in examination work in physical education. In all other subjects, with the exception of information and communications technology and religious education, standards are good. In information and communications technology they are satisfactory but in religious education they are unsatisfactory because there is not enough time given to the subject. Achievement in lessons in Key Stage 4 is similar to that in Key Stage 3. In 1999 and on the basis of what pupils achieved at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1997, the progress that pupils made was well above the progress made in schools with similar Key Stage 3 results. Pupils with special educational needs continue to achieve well because of the work done on basic literacy skills in Key Stage 3.
- 13 In the sixth form standards of work are very good in mathematics, science and design and technology with many students determined to get the higher grades. Standards of work seen in all other subjects were at least good. In all subjects students are making good progress and in music they are making very good

progress. The very detailed analysis that the school does indicates that in 2000 students made progress in line with or better than predicted in art, chemistry, design and technology, economics, history, physical education and psychology. Progress was not as good but still satisfactory in biology and physics, English, geography, mathematics and theatre studies. In modern foreign languages the achievements were also not as expected because a large number of students who had achieved well in their GCSEs and thoroughly enjoyed their languages found the transition to A-level work demanding.

- 14 The school recognises that it does have some very able pupils and makes good provision for these pupils both in lessons and through activities on a Saturday arranged in conjunction with schools. It has not, however, identified pupils who might be gifted or talented. Departments recognise the talented pupils in their subjects as the higher ability pupils but the school does not identify pupils who might be gifted.
- 15 The school set challenging and realistic targets for 2000. These were based on information on individual pupils and included a factor that reflected the difference the school thought it could make. The school was very close to achieving its targets for five or more passes at grades A\*-C and exceeded its target for average total points per pupil. Targets for 2001 are also challenging but achievable.

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

- 16 One of the major strengths of the school is the very positive attitudes of pupils to work and to school life. Parents rightly recognise and value this feature, a feature that has improved since the previous inspection. Pupils enjoy coming to school and talk enthusiastically about their lessons and the wide range of other activities available to them; some are still talking about their July activities week. The design and technology area is often busy at lunch-time and after school. Younger pupils preparing for the Micro Mouse Challenge were excited and stimulated as they exchanged ideas for building a small robot. A group of older pupils were absorbed in, and fascinated by, their attempts to design a miniature self-supporting Ferris wheel prior to their entry in the British Constructional Steel Association Challenge. A third group of GCSE pupils were in the room voluntarily finishing off work.
- 17 This willingness and eagerness to work is reflected throughout the whole school. Pupils clearly consider it totally acceptable to want to work hard. They recognise and applaud effort and achievement. They have a diligent and conscientious approach to their lessons. Calculators were at the ready in a mathematics lesson in Year 9, who were about to practise working with decimal numbers. This diligent approach is often maintained throughout the lesson and develops quite rapidly into enthusiasm and excitement. An entire class of pupils taking their GCSE in Spanish in the summer joined in a 'Twenty Questions' game about careers with great interest and energy. In many lessons numerous hands are raised to answer questions and pupils are often disappointed when they are not chosen to respond. Young language learners were very eager to identify and practise saying their classmates' names in Russian. The teacher diplomatically took great care to ensure that everyone had an opportunity to contribute.
- 18 Pupils are invariably eager to settle to their own work whether it is a written task or a practical activity. The youngest pupils showed very high levels of concentration as they focused on writing about Noah's Ark in a religious education lesson. Slightly older artists were keen to get on with completing ideas sheets for mask designs.

- 19 These very positive attitudes coupled with the very good teaching result in high levels of industry and achievement in the classrooms. This was evident in a physics lesson for 14-year-olds where the pupils were genuinely reflective in their discussion. They were obviously thinking very carefully about the value of information and communications technology in improving their understanding of science as they produced graphs about velocity and acceleration.
- 20 Pupils have a very positive approach to homework. They are proud of their planners and use them well to record details of requirements. Work completed is presented carefully and imaginatively. This is another feature of their attitudes that is impacting positively on standards.
- 21 The approach of sixth form students to school is equally impressive. Health and social care students were showing great interest in their work on communication skills. A-level physical education students were asking their own very perceptive questions about the definitions of outdoor education during a theory session. Final year psychology students were clearly enjoying the subject and revelling in each other's contributions to a discussion about twin studies. Discussions with sixth formers showed a real loyalty to the school, a feature demonstrated by their smart appearance in school sweatshirts.
- 22 Pupils with special education needs are enthusiastic about their work and work hard, particularly in small group sessions and one-to-one sessions. They rarely distract each other and often their involvement in their work is such that they don't know that another pupil is not working as he or she should be. They enjoy using computers. A very purposeful atmosphere was generated by the enthusiasm and commitment of a group of young pupils following a reading and spelling programme. All pupils respond to the very challenging approaches that are used, particularly in English and mathematics. They thrive on success and teachers ensure that they experience this and also learn.
- 23 Pupils behave very well at all times in the school. This application of the school's clear code of conduct allows the whole community to get on with the business of learning. Lessons are invariably characterised by purposeful activity. When pupils are required to sit and work quietly they do so willingly and calmly. When lessons demand more activity they revel in the opportunity without exploiting the freedom they are given. Groups of Year 7 historians had made their own board games depicting the life of an ancient Chinese woman. Very high levels of excitement were evident as they used the games. This group managed themselves well, waiting their turn to play with care and consideration.
- 24 Pupils are also careful and considerate as they move around the school. The buildings have been added to and extended over the last decade. There is now a maze of doors, passageways, stairs and small corridors. Despite these restrictions pupils show high levels of awareness of the needs of the others, holding doors open and waiting patiently to pass through. They behave equally well when gathered in large groups. Pupils queue in a mature and civilised manner for lunch in the canteen and stack their own chairs away sensibly and safely whilst leaving assemblies in the main hall.
- 25 A very few pupils find conforming to the school's expectations difficult. The unsatisfactory behaviour of these pupils does not affect the progress that other pupils are making. It does not upset the genuinely harmonious atmosphere of the school. This is because teachers deal with incidents appropriately and there is good pastoral support. The pupils' response to the school's outstanding arrangements to promote

an environment free from bullying is very good. Bullying is rare. Pupils feel secure that when it does occur it is handled quickly, carefully and sensitively.

- 26 Mutual confidence and trust are results of the harmonious atmosphere that the school has so successfully created. The school is a genuinely caring community that fosters a sense of responsibility and citizenship. Pupils and students support one another in lessons. High levels of co-operation are evident in many lessons. Older students studying food technology were reviewing their ideas and preparing their designs for a foreign dish. They were able to discuss their work with others who made constructive suggestions. High levels of effort were evident as young dancers performed their sequences based on the themes of gangs. Mutual support was evident as they danced without embarrassment.
- 27 The relationships between boys and girls and the different age groups are equally relaxed and supportive. In the many discussions with inspectors, boys and girls listened to one another with interest, proposing, seconding and at times disagreeing with frankness and openness. Younger pupils were interested and concerned as they watched a group of the oldest pupils perform a role-play in assembly about bullying. Sixth formers work exceptionally well supporting and encouraging the youngest pupils with their reading.
- 28 Pupils relate very well to all adults in the community. High levels of rapport are evident in many lessons as instanced by a Year 7 tutor period focusing on the development of study skills. Excellent learning was taking place because of the shared energy, interest and warmth. Warm, relaxed relationships between staff and pupils are apparent in many situations in the school. Pupils and teacher enjoyed the humour emerging in the mistakes being made in a lesson for new Russian speakers.
- 29 All pupils and students appreciate the needs, feelings and experiences of others. Younger pupils in a religious education lesson, looking at the conversion of Saul, were sharing their understanding of Christian beliefs and tenets. There was a palpable sense of purpose as they related and listened to their peers' experiences of important life moments. They show high levels of tolerance towards and interest in other cultures. Fascination and absorption were evident as 13-year-olds listened to a religious education teacher's description of her visit to a Buddhist monastery. Pupils are alert to opportunities to support actively and materially those temporarily or permanently disadvantaged. Their response to the recent Mozambique Flood Relief appeal was massive. They raise over £10,000 for good causes during a year.
- 30 The personal development of the pupils is very good and enables them to make critical judgements about themselves and their relationships with others. They take responsibility for themselves, their possessions and their life in school. The school is kept in very good condition by the site staff. Pupils play their part in caring for their environment by willingly performing litter duty on a tutor group rotation basis. In lessons they willingly give out books and eagerly volunteer for any particular tasks and responsibilities.
- 31 Pupils and students embrace the many opportunities that the school provides for them to take responsibility for aspects of school life. Careers librarians manage the resources and help in the library. GNVQ health and social care students supported the medical team whilst completing the meningitis inoculation programme. These students managed the administration, organised the pupils and catered for all the needs of the medical team in an exemplary fashion. A strong house system is securely in place in the school. Pupils are proud to belong to their respective house and identify closely with house success. Form and house captains perform their

representative duties seriously and conscientiously. Many of the oldest pupils are prefects. Their composure is impressive as they fulfil their school leadership role. By the time the students reach the sixth form many are showing exceptionally high levels of personal development. These students are mature, responsible and charming young adults.

- 32 A factor that is contributing to the high standards achieved by pupils is their very good attendance. The rates for the older pupils are particularly impressive. Pupils want to come to school. Attendance has improved significantly since the previous inspection partly because of these positive attitudes and partly because of improved procedures for promoting attendance.

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

- 33 At the time of the last inspection teaching was said to be satisfactory in only 80 per cent of lessons. Learning was said to be satisfactory in a similar proportion of lessons. Teachers were said to find teaching classes of mixed attainment challenging and in the weaker lessons pupils were not thoroughly involved in the tasks set for them by their teachers.
- 34 Teaching is now a strength of the school and leads directly to high levels of attainment. In the main school it is good in over eight lessons in every ten and very good or excellent in four lessons in every ten. In the sixth form teaching is even better. Almost all lessons are good and almost six lessons in every ten are very good or excellent. During the inspection no unsatisfactory teaching was seen.
- 35 A number of features contribute to the very good teaching. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subjects they teach and this enables them to provide an appropriate intellectual stimulus for pupils. There is sound long-term planning through effective teaching schemes in all subjects that ensure pupils make very good progress in their learning. In almost all lessons teachers have high expectations of pupils' attainment and they challenge them to do well and improve. For example, in a Year 10 lower ability group pupils used a narrative video and textbook material about GIs to write good responses to the challenging question "Do you think the Americans were more racially prejudiced than the British during World War Two?"
- 36 Classroom control is very good. This could be seen in a Year 8 food technology lesson where pupils made small cakes using a particular technique. The lesson was well prepared and the teacher had established good working practices over time enabling very good classroom control, which together with the management of time and resources led to very good results. Here, as in most lessons, pupils made very good creative and physical efforts and learned a great deal.
- 37 Teachers know their pupils very well and relationships are friendly. As a result, pupils know that teachers have their best interests at heart. Teachers manage their pupils very well and use encouragement and humour effectively to motivate them. Thus pupils are interested and concentrate very effectively. Teachers encourage pupils to work with increasing independence as they move through the school. The methods used are good and appropriate to the knowledge and skills that are being taught. In a Year 9 religious education lesson the teacher had visited a Buddhist monastery with a video camera. She was able to show pupils the video she had recorded and to share with them her first-hand experiences. This led to an animated and productive discussion in which pupils made particularly good gains in personal development through a better understanding of spiritual, moral and cultural issues.

- 38 Time and resources are used well and there is often a crisp pace through lessons. As a result, pupils work hard with good application. Homework is used well to support and extend pupils' understanding of work begun in class.
- 39 Day-to-day assessment of pupils' progress is used well by most teachers to ensure activities are matched to pupils' levels of attainment. However, this information is not always shared effectively with pupils or their parents. In many exercise books there are examples of good practice in setting pupils very specific targets for improvement, but this is not the case for all teachers. The school knows that this is an area for further work. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are aware of their general progress in learning. This level of awareness improves in Years 10 and 11 where the more structured approach required in preparation for examinations ensures that teachers provide both pupils and parents with specific information on progress.
- 40 In the sixth form the quality of teaching is consistently high and leads to good learning. Teachers encourage independence in their students and enable them to begin to take charge of their own learning in preparation for higher education. In a modern languages lesson in Year 13 students were divided into groups and set the task of working in pairs to prepare a presentation on how to construct and use verbs in different tenses. Each group had a different tense to work on and had to provide the whole class with a set of notes and exercises to ensure they understood how the tense worked in practice. Thus all those preparing the work gained a very thorough understanding. Others in the group learned a great deal from the explanations provided by their friends.
- 41 In a Year 13 psychology lesson the class was divided into pairs to develop their understanding of the issue of conformity and to feed this back into a class discussion. All students were fully involved and made good gains in their learning. They contributed well to the ensuing discussion and made some very mature responses on types of conformity. These ranged very widely to encompass gender and cultural issues. The result was a very effective lesson that ensured high levels of interest and intellectual effort. Students are very interested in their work. They acquire knowledge and skills very effectively, make very good intellectual and creative efforts, concentrate well, work very hard and have a very good understanding of their progress.
- 42 When teaching is satisfactory rather than good it is usually because the teachers' classroom management is less secure or the methods that they use do not interest and motivate pupils as effectively.
- 43 The teaching of pupils with special educational needs by specialist teachers in the individual learning support department is very good. Teaching within small groups and in one-to-one lessons is always very good and sometimes quite outstanding. These are always well-organised lessons that provide help for the pupils and also challenge them to improve. When experienced learning support teachers teach English and mathematics to the lower attaining groups they plan effectively and have very good relationships with their pupils. As a result, pupils behave well, have positive attitudes and make good progress in the development of their basic skills in literacy and numeracy. Pupils' achievements are good and the progress they make is very well documented. Very good use is made of information and communications technology to support the development of pupils' reading and spelling skills
- 44 More generally, teachers have a good knowledge of these pupils and their specific difficulties. However, in some mixed attainment classes in English the work is not always suitably matched to the needs of the lower attaining pupils. All pupils with

special educational needs have an individual education plan. Teachers have well written extracts from these that set out appropriate targets for both teachers and pupils to work towards. The relationships between pupils and teachers are friendly and this motivates pupils so that they want to learn and will persevere when the work is difficult. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in all subjects. Their progress is especially good in those lessons where a learning support teacher or assistant is present. They intervene appropriately and make best use of their time by helping other pupils and ensuring that the subject teacher also is able to help pupils with learning difficulties.

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

- 45 At the time of the last inspection the curriculum was said not to fully meet the aims of the school. Since then the school's aims have been restated and the curriculum reviewed and re-planned. It is clear that the new curriculum now meets the aims the school has set for itself.
- 46 In Years 7 to 9 the curriculum meets the requirements of the National Curriculum and the wide range of pupils' needs. There are particularly good arrangements for modern foreign languages and these help to ensure that pupils' attainment is high. All pupils study French in Years 7 to 9. In Year 8 they extend their study to two languages and can choose between Spanish and Russian. Information and communications technology is taught through separate lessons in Years 7 and 8. In Year 9 the teaching takes place through other subjects. There is good practice in several subject departments. Overall, however, these arrangements, at present, mean that some aspects of the National Curriculum programme of study, for example, the use of logo in mathematics and the application of databases and e-mail, are not taught in sufficient depth.
- 47 In Years 10 and 11 the curriculum is generally good and meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. All pupils follow a core programme of English, mathematics and science, and an options programme allows them to choose five additional subjects. The arrangements for choice are good and, should they wish to, pupils can choose to study two languages, two subjects from the humanities or two subjects from the arts. Pressure on teaching time means that one of these five subjects is designated a short course and has only half the number of lessons of the other subjects. These arrangements are suitably flexible. Many pupils follow an examination syllabus leading to a short course GCSE examination. The highest attainers are able, by working in their own time, to take an examination for a full course GCSE.
- 48 There are also good arrangements for vocational education. These courses are very practically orientated, motivate pupils very well and have the advantage of catering for a wide range of attainment. At the time of the last inspection the school was criticised for not making sufficient arrangements to accredit the work of lower attaining pupils. The range of vocational courses provides well for these pupils. It is also possible for pupils who will find it difficult to attain a grade in the GCSE examination in English to study for a nationally recognised Certificate of Achievement.
- 49 In addition, pupils are supported by a programme that includes social education, careers education, information and communications technology and religious education. The timetable for these subjects is arranged as a cycle. Thus pupils study each of the subjects in turn for several weeks and then do not return to study

them again for some time. These arrangements work satisfactorily for all of the subjects except religious education. The long time gap between periods of study leads to a lack of continuity in teaching and this has an adverse effect on standards. Also, the time allocated for the teaching of religious education does not allow for the statutory requirements of the locally agreed syllabus to be met.

- 50 A well-planned personal and social education programme provides additional support for pupils. The programme includes good arrangements for sex and drugs education. Careers education is well managed. All pupils engage in a period of work experience and the school makes good use of local careers advisory staff to give advice to pupils in Year 11. A small weakness is the tutorial period that takes place at the start of afternoon school. There is much good practice by many teachers but this is variable overall. Some pupils have good opportunities to explore issues. For example, in a Year 11 session pupils were skilfully confronted with the morality of making choices and owning up to mistakes. In some sessions, however, time is not used as well and pupils read or chat.
- 51 The sixth form is new since the last inspection and the curriculum is already very good. Students can choose from a full range of 18 A- and AS-level subjects. An important feature of students' choice is the opportunity to study for GNVQs and students are encouraged to combine their study for these awards with an A-level. There are good arrangements for students to broaden their perspective through a well taught general studies programme and the 'futures' course ensures that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education. They are also able to take part in an effective sports programme. The learning opportunities in the sixth form are particularly good.
- 52 Throughout the curriculum there is equality of access. Although in some groups there is an imbalance between boys and girls, the difference overall in the attainment of boys and girls is below that found nationally. Pupils who have difficulties with English as an additional language are well supported. The school uses the services of the local education authority to help pupils who have very marked difficulties. The records kept by the school demonstrate that these pupils do well in their final examinations. Pupils with special educational needs are well catered for. A well-planned programme of additional help ensures that they make good gains in basic skills. They are well-integrated into lessons and teachers make good provision to ensure that they are supported.
- 53 There is a very good programme of extra-curricular activities in many subjects and they are well attended. Each lunch-time a homework club, for all pupils, is very popular and well supervised. Pupils are offered support and access to computers and the library to help them extend their work. Additional opportunities are provided each year when the timetable is suspended for an activities week. This allows visits to be planned and for pupils to engage in more ambitious projects. The sixth form has the opportunity to take part in a team building weekend involving outdoor pursuits at the Malvern Hills Outdoor Centre.
- 54 The school works hard to ensure that pupils understand and experience the wider community. The impact of technology college status is strongly felt in the information and communications technology and design and technology departments. Here there are many useful links with local organisations and other schools. The opportunity to apply industrial practices, such as using computer generated designs to print T-shirts, encourage interested students to think about the applications of their studies in real life situations. Each Thursday a group of the eldest children from a

local primary school use the computer facilities. The school provides a telephone help line to advise local schools about information and communications technology.

- 55 All pupils have good opportunities to learn beyond the school gates. Geographers, for example, research the tourism of the local area. The health and social care pupils visit and work in local schools, nurseries and homes. The youngest pupils perform a Christingle service in the local church. Life skills students visit the local courts. Good use is also made of local people to extend the pupils' experiences. A wide range of people from the community support the personal and social education programme. Young pupils who are studying Russian talked with knowledge and insight about the three visitors to the school from the Moscow State Circus.
- 56 The school is fast becoming a community focal point for the village of Charlton Kings. Several organisations make good use of the school's facilities. The school promotes and organises its own programme for community use of the sports facilities. This is a successful and popular programme and a significant number of the current pupils and students are involved.
- 57 The links that the school has developed with local primary schools are good overall. Transfer and induction procedures are also very good and contain some unusual and very successful features. Over 300 nine-year-olds participate in 'Fast Thinker Day'. The science department prepares a Sherlock Holmes type mystery where pupils have to solve a series of clues over the day spent in school. The head of the individual learning department visits all primary schools and meets every child who will be attending. These arrangements ensure a secure transfer from primary to secondary school. Although there are visits between primary and secondary schools of numeracy and literacy co-ordinators, for example, there is no reported structure for all departments to liaise on a regular basis.
- 58 Good links exist with colleges and universities. The school accesses and makes good use of a full range of information about universities and colleges. Taster visits are well planned and result in many students speaking with confidence and knowledge about their plans for the future.
- 59 There are good arrangements across the curriculum to ensure that pupils' literacy and numeracy skills are well developed. There is a good cross-curricular literacy strategy and there is evidence of good literacy skills improving pupils' performance across a wide range of subjects. There is noticeable progression in literacy skills as pupils move through the school. Levels of numeracy are impressive and support pupils in their work in other subjects. However, a whole school numeracy policy would be useful in sharing good practice of teaching techniques. In responding to the changes in what is provided for students in the sixth form, the school has not yet tackled the issue of how to provide Key Skills Application of Number modules for students not studying on GNVQ courses. There is now a taught programme of study skills that both supports and is re-inforced by departments.
- 60 Arrangements for the spiritual development of pupils are satisfactory. There is a full programme of house and year assemblies, which are used to promote the social and moral development of pupils. In a very effective house assembly, Year 11 pupils conducted a presentation on bullying, including role-play that had been written by a sixth form student. However, most assemblies rarely provide an element of spirituality or time for reflection and the school still fails to comply fully with the statutory requirements for collective worship. Tutor time is used mainly for social and administrative purposes and few opportunities are provided for pupils to share their values and beliefs. Within the curriculum, religious education makes a very

significant contribution to the spiritual development of the school with a strong focus on personal reflection. Other such opportunities are provided in science, history and art, but, elsewhere, these opportunities are limited.

- 61 The arrangements for moral education are very good. The concept of the school as a moral community is strongly to the fore and there is a clear code of conduct both in documentation and in practice. The school has a sense of shared purpose and teachers, prefects and members of the sixth form provide excellent role models. There is also positive reinforcement of the school's values through the house system and various charity initiatives, such as the Year 7 charity work with the British Heart Foundation and the whole school project on Mozambique. The moral development of pupils is sustained in most subjects, particularly in personal and social education, religious education, science and GNVQ health and social care, where an excellent lesson on drugs education was observed during the inspection. Pupils in all curriculum areas are encouraged to respect the opinions of others and to show respect for their teachers.
- 62 The arrangements for social development are also very good. The house and prefect system encourages pupils to take responsibility and the various house councils provide a useful channel of communication between staff and pupils. In addition, there are numerous opportunities for social development in the sixth form, including residential visits and the Young Enterprise scheme, in which the school has been successful in a countywide competition. During the inspection, a very effective paired reading session was observed in which sixth form students provided excellent role models for Year 7 pupils.
- 63 Relationships are very positive throughout the school and create an atmosphere of harmony and community between staff and pupils alike. The impressive range of lunch-time and after-school provision enhances the taught curriculum and provides opportunities for social development in all subjects, but especially in history, art, information and communications technology, modern foreign languages, music and science.
- 64 The arrangements for cultural development of pupils are good. There is a strong programme of visits and extra-curricular activities to enrich pupils' knowledge and experience. This has addressed an issue arising from the previous inspection report. Cultural awareness is also fostered through many activities, such as sports teams and music and drama productions. In addition, there are numerous trips abroad to foster pupils' experience of other European cultures and the school has links with three schools in Europe through the Comenius programme. There are also opportunities for pupils to reflect on and to celebrate the cultural diversity of society in religious education, where there is an emphasis on multi-faith issues, and in art, where there is a specific 'East meets West' project in Year 10. In other subjects, this aspect of school life is underdeveloped.
- 65 Overall, the school has maintained and built on the achievements outlined in the previous inspection report in this area, and much creditable work has been done to foster a shared sense of purpose and a harmonious community. There is still work to be done in some areas, notably in the effective use of form tutor time, the provision of a daily act of collective worship and the preparation of pupils for life in a multi-cultural society. There also needs to be clarification of how subject areas are contributing to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural life of the school.

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

- 66 The level of care that the school provides for its pupils and students is very high, underpinned by the very good relationships throughout the school. The harmonious atmosphere created ensures that all pupils learn quickly to feel secure in their environment. Parents are justifiably highly appreciative of this feature of school life.
- 67 The pastoral system is based on a very strong house system. Very good transfer and induction arrangements ensure that pupils' needs are identified and supported by careful allocation to tutor groups. The tutor groups are house based and remain more or less the same until after GCSE examinations. The Year 7 tutor team is skilled in meeting the needs of the youngest pupils. Pupils have a new tutor in Year 8 who stays with them till the end of Year 9. They change in Year 10 for a third tutor to take them through till the end of Year 11 and GCSE. Heads of house are given high levels of autonomy and responsibility and are appropriately held to account for their actions. They provide very good leadership for their teams of tutors. Clear descriptions of expectations of the role are provided and sensitive guidance is given to the handling of situations. Registrations and tutor periods are generally used well to support pupils although there is some variation in quality. A stunning Year 7 session was observed where the tutor obviously knew her group exceptionally well. She took careful and discreet account of their particular abilities as she challenged them to think about the equipment that they would need to help them study.
- 68 Staff are committed to meeting the needs of each individual pupil. Pupils in turn are confident that they will be given the appropriate help and support. Staff make good use of the many informal opportunities in school life to exchange information about particular pupils and situations. Formal opportunities such as the weekly house heads' meeting are very well used to communicate concerns about individual pupils.
- 69 The school works closely and effectively with other agencies. The school nurse runs a useful drop-in session every week and is closely involved with the health and social care pupils. A small group of pupils who require help in maintaining positive relationships with others are well supported by an outside specialist. These links benefit the overall welfare of pupils experiencing difficulties as they progress through the school.
- 70 The school has very good arrangements for promoting good behaviour which ensure the very civilised atmosphere that exists. The code of conduct is consistently applied and clearly understood by the school community. Sanctions, including exclusion as the ultimate penalty, are fairly and sensitively applied to those very few students who do break the rules. The success of the current system is evident in the falling exclusion rate. Merits are usually used well to motivate the pupils. The modern foreign languages department uses rewards particularly well. Lessons are punctuated with 'have a tick' called in Spanish, Russian and French. Ten ticks are required to gain a merit. Pupils eagerly write their ticks into their planners and want more.
- 71 Attendance figures have improved markedly in the last few years and are very good. This is partly a result of the increased vigour and rigour of all staff in fulfilling their responsibilities. It is also a direct result of the outstanding contribution of the attendance technician. Her confidence, competence and commitment ensure that pupils and parents understand the importance of regular attendance and communication about absence.

- 72 Child protection arrangements are very good. Equally good arrangements exist for the care of sick and injured children. The medical room is sensibly situated near the general office and the trained staff are caring, concerned and conscientious. Health and safety arrangements are very good. The governing body fulfils its health and safety responsibilities exceptionally well. Monitoring is rigorous and communication secure. Risk assessment audits are carried out twice yearly. Concerns are immediately followed up and improvement secured. The site management team keeps the school in very good condition and this has a positive impact on the welfare of the whole school community.
- 73 The school has effective arrangements for assessing pupils' attainment and progress. Assessment requirements of the National Curriculum are fully in place as are those of public examinations at 16 and 18. Departments assess pupils' academic attainment and progress regularly according to their departmental policy. They use the information appropriately to guide future planning. There is however no specific whole school policy that relates procedures to National Curriculum criteria and serves to provide more detailed information to parents.
- 74 Departmental assessment practice is generally successful except in information and communications technology. The department lacks an assessment framework for pupils in their first three years. Assessment practice within vocational education is particularly good. The nature of the subjects and the way they are taught lend themselves to and require regular review and assessment. Assessment practice in English and in design and technology is good. Marking is generally well used to assess pupils' work and guide their progress.
- 75 Pupils and parents say, and inspectors observed, that the different systems in use by different departments can restrict pupils' and parents' opportunities to fully understand the progress pupils are making. Pupils are guided well in lessons and teachers are aware of how their pupils are getting on. However, there are inconsistencies and some departments have more successful practice than others.
- 76 Target setting for improvement in individual pupils' work is used effectively in some departments. Tutors also encourage pupils to set targets for themselves based on grades on interim progress sheets produced once a year or their annual report. This activity is useful and gives pupils and parents a general picture of a pupil's effort and attainment within the different subjects. It also creates an opportunity for a dialogue between tutor and tutee. However the grades that are given, ranging from one to four, are related to the set that the pupil is in. It is not easy, therefore, for the reader to track progress and to identify progress against potential in Key Stage 3.
- 77 In their final year before taking GCSE examinations pupils are supported individually through a mentoring programme. It provides four interviews of 20 minutes during the year. This is an extremely useful addition to the support programme particularly in terms of personal progress and development. Attitudes, behaviour, attendance, homework, coursework and future careers are all discussed. Consideration is carefully given to the pupil's own interpretation of his or her progress. Mentors, who might be a teacher, a member of support staff or, on occasions, a governor, have the grades that teachers are predicting a pupil will achieve in their GCSEs on the basis of their current work. They also have the grades that indicate what a pupil could achieve on the basis of previous tests when they joined the school. Unfortunately, as yet they do not have an indication from the subjects about areas for improvement.

- 78 Academic guidance in the sixth form is very good. Individual subject staff and form tutors engage in regular discussion with the students about their strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement.
- 79 Overall, personal support and guidance is good. The school is quick to identify concerns about a pupil's personal development. An action plan is produced and parents are almost always seen. An interview form is completed which has a wide circulation within the pastoral team. This ensures that everyone is aware of the situation. National Records of Achievement are well used by all pupils, particularly to track their own personal development.
- 80 Very good guidance is provided for pupils with special educational needs. The individual learning department has individual education plans, which they use to inform their work in English and mathematics, in small groups and in one-to-one work. Pupil information sheets are provided for and used by all subject teachers. Teachers and support staff show a clear understanding of their needs and record well the progress being made. In preparation for annual reviews, or occasions where there are new concerns, subject teachers complete detailed reviews. Tutors do a personal review with pupils that supports good practice in self-assessment.

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

- 81 Parents are very supportive of the school. They recognise and applaud the high quality of education that it is providing for their children. They are rightly particularly appreciative of what the school provides and the attitudes and values which enable each pupil to develop as an individual.
- 82 There is a range of high quality information provided for parents about the school. The prospectus is strikingly presented and the material is interesting, informative and appropriate. A good range of curriculum information booklets has been provided as a follow up to a parent's suggestion. The annual governors' report is outstanding, both in presentation and the quality of the information it provides. This high quality was evident at the annual parents' meeting held during inspection week. Governors talked confidently about the school and were secure in their responses to questions. They showed exceptionally good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development.
- 83 The individual learning department has very good links with parents. Parents who have children with special educational needs are kept well informed of the work that their children are doing and are encouraged to help their children with spelling and reading. They are well involved in the annual reviews and are told by letter, at the end of a specific programme of help, how much their children's reading and spelling has improved.
- 84 The school provides three distinct opportunities for parents to be kept informed about the progress their pupils are making. There is very good attendance at the individual pupil consultation evenings held annually and arrangements for these evenings are appropriate. Annual reports generally comply with statutory requirements, although not all departments include sufficiently detailed information about what pupils have actually done.
- 85 A few parents' concerns, about the quality of information that is provided for them on how well their children are progressing, are justified. Although annual reports are carefully written and teachers are positive about pupils to parents, they lack specific

information about what the pupils find difficult and how they might improve. Interim progress sheets are also produced and give a useful indication of effort and attainment on a one to four scale. An accompanying letter explains what the scale means. However these grades are given according to the set the pupil is in and this inhibits parents' total understanding of exactly how their child is getting on. It also restricts their understanding of how the child is likely to perform in national tests at age 14 in particular. Information for parents of the oldest pupils and the students in the sixth form is of higher quality and more specific. The school has produced a useful range of letters that accompany the reports if a pupil's progress is particularly commendable or disconcerting.

- 86 Parents are encouraged to feel involved in the life of the school. They were effectively involved in the consultation about the home-school agreement, for example, and have been regularly consulted about the uniform. The school does welcome parents to discuss issues and concerns. Heads of house develop positive partnerships with parents. The Parents, Teachers and Friends Association makes a particularly valuable and valued contribution to school life
- 87 Parents effectively support their children's learning at home and at school. They allow and encourage them to take part in the large number of foreign trips organised by the languages department. They support the wide range of sporting activities. Planners are used effectively to communicate between home and school. Although homework was well used during the inspection week to support pupils' learning at home, some parents expressed concerns about the inconsistent use of homework. This view was supported by some groups of pupils and endorsed by some inspectors, although other pupils and inspectors expressed an opposite view. This is not seen as a major whole school issue.

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

- 88 The headteacher, supported by an exceptionally active and able governing body, provides outstanding leadership. He is well supported by effective senior and middle managers and a high quality team of teaching and support staff. It is the quality of the governors, the headteacher and the staff in the school and their commitment to providing the best for their pupils and students that makes this a very good school. The leadership and management at all levels are committed to raising levels of attainment and have ensured that the school has made rapid and impressive improvements over the last four years.
- 89 The school has reviewed its aims and identified, in consultation with parents and pupils, a new school slogan "From strength to strength". The aims state clearly that the school is committed to ensuring the highest achievement and the best provision within a caring and stimulating learning environment. These aims are reflected in practice. The school seeks to challenge all pupils to achieve their best and provides the support that pupils and students need in order to do this. Whilst providing well for pupils and students of higher and average ability, the curriculum has been improved in both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 to meet the needs of lower attainers and pupils with learning difficulties. Equality of opportunity is a reality.
- 90 The school has a very strong and experienced governing body that is very good at fulfilling its statutory responsibilities. Governors have been very appropriately involved in major decisions that affect the strategic direction of the school. They have been a driving force with the headteacher in the achievement of technology college status, in the expansion of accommodation and, with the head of the sixth form, in developing this successful provision. They have very good links with

departments, attending or receiving minutes of meetings and sometimes observing teaching in order to increase their knowledge of areas to which they are linked.

- 91 The headteacher expects those with responsibility to take the initiative in fulfilling their responsibilities. He and other managers then provide the support through a system of line management that helps colleagues to do their work. In modern foreign languages and the individual learning department, for example, the headteacher's style of delegation is replicated through the sharing of responsibilities within the team and similar expectations that staff will act on their own initiative but with support. There is a strong sense of professionalism and teamwork amongst the governors, the senior team and departments.
- 92 The leadership and management of all departments are at least good and in English, history, design and technology, vocational education and in the individual learning department they are very good. The leadership provided by the head of the sixth form has been outstanding and has helped a team of teachers to quickly adapt to the demands of advanced courses. The leadership and influence of the house heads are very strong and lead to a very effective house system and good support for pupils' personal development. In this atmosphere of collegiate responsibility, initiatives and new developments thrive. There is, therefore, much good practice but which has not yet been adopted as whole school policy. A good example of this is the assessment practice in English that could usefully be used to update the previous assessment policy.
- 93 The school's development plan and the planning process are models of good practice. They are based on a very thorough review of progress both of the previous plan and department development plans. The depth of the evaluation is impressive. There is very good consultation with staff and appropriate involvement of governors. The school sets challenging and realistic targets for GCSE examinations based on high quality data on individual pupils.
- 94 Financial planning and management are exemplary and good use is made of additional grants to achieve a set of very coherent priorities. Good use has been made of the resources that come with technology college status to improve the use of information and communications technology in a number of subjects. Effective use is made of information and communications technology to support the management and administration within the school. The appointment of a network manager and a technician has been significant in ensuring that all systems are well serviced and maintained in very good working condition. The use of computers within the individual learning department to support pupils' learning and administration is excellent.
- 95 The monitoring of teaching and learning through the analysis of test and examination results is exceptionally thorough. Departments and individual teachers who are particularly successful are identified and those where improvements need to be made. The senior management team looks at samples of work and the headteacher follows a pupil's timetable for a day and through this process sees every teacher teach. Some heads of department are already observing colleagues teach and others are beginning the process in preparation for implementing performance management. This is done systematically by the heads of department in geography and physical education, for example, and paired observations occur in modern foreign languages. However, observation of teaching and learning is not sufficiently systematic or rigorous to ensure that all teachers have the opportunity to observe some excellent practice and to improve still further.

- 96 There are sufficient teachers and support staff to meet the demands of the curriculum, although there are some non-specialists teaching mathematics. The school has appointed appropriate staff, including a qualified librarian, and developed the skills of its own staff to meet the needs of students in the sixth form. The school appoints its own catering and premises staff and these provide high quality services to the school. Administrative staff ensure the efficient running of the school office and other support services. Those appointed to support departments that do not have technicians provide a very valuable service to those departments.
- 97 There is a very good induction programme for both newly qualified teachers and teachers new to the school or new to their posts. There are new heads of department in modern foreign languages, mathematics, business education and music who have quickly established themselves in post. The school makes very good provision for students in initial teacher training within a well-established partnership with higher education. Staff development is well organised and provides effectively for the needs of the school, departments and individual teachers. Appraisal has been in place for a number of years and the school is on target for implementation of performance management.
- 98 Accommodation is generally sufficient although there are not enough smaller practice spaces in music. There have been significant improvements with the new accommodation for the sixth form and for modern foreign languages. Rooms for mathematics and individual learning are in different buildings, which means that staff have to make that extra effort to keep in touch. There is no fixed room for GCSE and A-level examination work in physical education. The standard of accommodation is good because there is a rolling programme of expansion and improvement and because staff and pupils maintain it at a high standard. There is no graffiti and the communal facilities such as the toilets are in an exceptionally good condition, which pupils and students appreciate. The quality and cleanliness of the accommodation and the grounds is a credit to the school.
- 99 The school is well resourced because the governors, acting on the recommendations of the headteacher, have used their finances well. They have ensured that all teachers have a basic standard of resources to support their teaching, for example overhead projectors and televisions. Resources available in the library are good. There is a good range of computers, videos, newspapers and magazines to support learning. The quality and quantity of fiction and non-fiction texts are good. The library and computer rooms are available to pupils from early morning to the evening and both are well used, particularly at lunch-time. The number of computers in the school is above the national average. Information and communications technology is being increasingly used in departments although art, music and physical education are not as well equipped as they should be.
- 100 The school is very good at applying best value principles. It compares its performance with other schools in Gloucestershire, not just in terms of examination results but also in terms of staffing and expenditure. It challenges itself to do even better and questions what it does in order to continue to improve. Teachers, pupils and parents are regularly consulted as is the local education authority. It always seeks competitive tendering for work over £2000 and always seeks to get the best value at the best price and to get as much as it can from its finances.

## **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

- 101 There are a number of areas identified in the report and by the school where development is still needed. However, these are all to do with continuing the work

already begun. Since the previous inspection the school has done all that it could do in the time available. The governors and the headteacher have chosen the right priorities as evidenced in the improvements made, particularly in test and examination results. There is, therefore, only one key issue for improvement and one other area for the school to improve.

(1) The school needs to provide sufficient time for religious education in Key Stage 4 to meet the requirements of the Gloucestershire Agreed Syllabus. (Paragraphs 49 and 208)

In addition

The school needs to ensure better use of time with tutors to meet the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship. (Paragraph 60)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	187
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	57

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
12	35	40	13	0	0	0

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

### Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	921	199
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	47	

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	9	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	136	0

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

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	24
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	43

### Attendance

#### Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.0
National comparative data	7.9

#### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
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***

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	95	96	191

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	81	72	69
	Girls	87	79	72
	Total	168	151	141
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	89 (75)	79 (70)	74 (69)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	58 (28)	53 (57)	31 (38)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	69	70	73
	Girls	86	80	80
	Total	155	150	153
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	82 (76)	79 (79)	81 (82)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	36 (43)	54 (52)	42 (50)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15-year-olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	1999	84	79	163

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	58	80	84
	Girls	58	78	78
	Total	116	158	162
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	71 (53.4)	97 (88.8)	99 (93)
	National	46.6 (44.6)	90.9 (89.8)	95.8 (95.2)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	46 (39.6)
	National	38.0 (36.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	10	80
	National	n/a	n/a

### Attainment at the end of the sixth form

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
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	1999	40	44	84

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	n/a	n/a	n/a	1.5	1.6	1.6 (n/a)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (n/a)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (n/a)

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

### ***Ethnic background of pupils***

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	0
Indian	3
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	4
White	1075
Any other minority ethnic group	0

### ***Exclusions in the last school year***

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	30	1
Other minority ethnic groups	0	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)	63.2
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.8 : 1

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

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

Total number of education support staff	3
Total aggregate hours worked per week	24

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

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78.6
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13**

Key Stage 3	25.5
Key Stage 4	21.2
Sixth Form	12.4

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	1999
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	£
Total income	2,961,471
Total expenditure	3,055,016
Expenditure per pupil	2,894
Balance brought forward from previous year	53,445
Balance carried forward to next year	-40,100

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

### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out

1,098

Number of questionnaires returned

288

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

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	46	46	6	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	49	44	3	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	30	58	4	1	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24	57	12	4	3
The teaching is good.	33	56	4	0	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	28	51	13	2	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	53	37	4	3	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	60	35	2	0	3
The school works closely with parents.	27	52	13	1	7
The school is well led and managed.	44	48	3	1	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	45	46	4	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	32	45	9	1	13

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

### **ENGLISH**

- 102 Standards are above average for pupils at 14 and 16. Standards in the sixth form are good. Standards are improving because of the consistently high quality of teaching throughout the department and the positive manner in which pupils respond to the subject, which improves as they progress through the school. Standards observed during the inspection are in line with the good examination results.
- 103 In the 1999, results in end of Key Stage 3 tests were well above those attained in all schools. They were also above average in comparison with pupils from similar backgrounds. Standards have been well above average at both Levels 5 and 6 over the four-year period since 1996. The attainment of both boys and girls are well above the respective national averages. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress as a result of the very good provision made for them. Results for this year's end of Key Stage 3 tests indicate that standards have been maintained and remain above those expected for pupils in similar schools.
- 104 In Year 7 all pupils use full stops and capital letters appropriately because of teachers' attention to teaching these skills. Similarly, lower attaining pupils use adjectives well to improve their writing. Pupils in Year 7 write a page of a newspaper, adhering to the appropriate codes of layout and structure and using computers well to finish their work. They know how to use intonation in spoken language, which is developed in drama, where they also co-operate well with members of the group. Average attaining pupils in Year 8 work well together in replicating their own island, using William Golding's 'Lord of the Flies' as a prompt because the teacher has selected materials that interest them. Higher attaining pupils in Year 8 enjoy writing their own alternative ending to one of Ruth Rendell's short crime stories, again because the choice of texts is appropriate. In Year 9 the higher attaining pupils are able to write a text for different audiences, and to compare and contrast styles of writing because they are given many opportunities to practise this skill.
- 105 Standards attained by pupils aged 16 are well above the national average. In the 1999 GCSE English Language examination the national average for grades A\*-C was 55 per cent, while the school's result was 80 per cent. In the GCSE English Literature examination the national average for grades A\*-C was 60 per cent, while the school's result was 88 per cent. In both examinations, boys performed much better than boys in similar schools. Girls also performed better than girls in similar schools. In the 1999 English Language examination, every pupil entered attained grades A\*-G, while just a few less attained these grades in English Literature. A high proportion of pupils achieve the higher A\* or A grade in both examinations. Lower attaining pupils are successful in the literacy examination that is an alternative to the GCSE. The results in English compare favourably with other subjects in the school. Unvalidated results for this year's GCSE indicate that standards have been broadly maintained, and remain above those expected for 16-year-olds. Higher attaining pupils in Year 10 write to inform and to change opinions and are taught to use quotations well. Lower attaining pupils, stimulated by a range of resources, compare how different authors present the homeless with Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. In Year 11 higher attaining pupils analyse poems thoroughly, comparing and contrasting by focusing on different styles, tones and structures.

- 106 Provision for students in the sixth form is good. Standards seen at A-level are good. In 2000 when the first cohort of students was entered, all gained a pass grade, with a commendable 70 per cent gaining grades A-C. Girls perform better than boys and are better represented on the A-level courses. Inspection evidence indicates that virtually all of the current Year 12 and Year 13 are meeting course requirements. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good and encourages Year 12 students in the development of their analytical skills, as when studying *Othello*. Teachers use literary terminology well and see that students have a secure knowledge of plot and language. For example, in Year 13 students are familiar with Lytton Strachey's biography of Florence Nightingale and Boswell's biography of Doctor Johnson.
- 107 Results for GCSE drama are very good. In 1999, 92 per cent gained A\*-C grades, compared to 67 per cent in similar schools, though results are not quite as good this year. All pupils who have entered the examination have achieved at least a G grade. The theatre studies course is proving to be a successful subject at A-level too, with a 100 per cent pass rate in 2000. A high proportion of students went on to study related subjects in higher education.
- 108 Good use is made of information and communications technology. Pupils are given good opportunities to draft and present work using word-processing skill, as in their textual analysis of *Macbeth*. Effective use is made of programmes to develop some pupils' reading and this work is well supported by a small group of committed sixth formers.
- 109 Teaching in English is of good quality in Key Stages 3 and 4. Two out of three lessons seen in Key Stages 3 and 4 during the inspection were good or very good. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. This is a strong feature of the subject and is an improvement since the last inspection. Teaching is better in Key Stage 4, as it had been at the last inspection. The quality of teaching is generally consistent irrespective of the ability levels of the different classes. Teaching is very good in the sixth form. Because teaching is so good the department makes a very good contribution to the development of pupils literacy skills. Other subjects benefit from this and re-enforce the work of the department.
- 110 Teachers' subject knowledge and understanding in the way they develop basic skills is good. There is good progression in learning as pupils move through the school, with pupils responding to the personal attention teachers give to them with increasing enthusiasm as they get older. The curriculum is suitable for the needs of all pupils. Provision is very good in the sixth form and teachers have a clear enthusiasm for the subject, including in drama. Lesson planning is good, with pupils being well aware of the particular focus of every piece of work. Most lessons routinely cover all the different aspects of the subject. Lessons have sufficient challenge for the higher attaining pupils, while they also stretch the lower attaining pupils. Where additional provision is made for the lower attaining pupils it is usually very effective. Teachers enjoy good relationships with pupils, and when they engage the pupils in purposeful and brisk discussion they invariably respond well. The management of pupils' behaviour is usually very good, but, as before, this is the one aspect of teaching that sometimes needs further attention. Teachers do not usually tolerate inattention or indifferent presentation of work and are quick to pick up on both. The use of resources is good, including information and communications technology. Assessment, including for those with special educational needs, is good. Marking is very detailed and precise and the new pupil/teacher reading records in Year 7, and in some Year 8 classes, are excellent in valuing and respecting pupils efforts, no matter what their attainment. Marking informs pupils what they need to do to improve the standard of their work. Homework is valued and is contributing to the development of

pupils' skills. Displays of pupils' work are satisfactory, with some good examples. Teachers celebrate success well, as instanced by the use of a 'frame' that displays excellent work done by different pupils and groups of pupils over the course of a year. The organisation of classrooms so that all pupils are able to work with sustained concentration is sound. Only a few lessons in drama were seen, but evidence suggests that teaching in drama is good overall and is better in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

- 111 Pupils' behaviour is usually very good in English and drama. Their attitudes are also usually very good and most are confident to put forward their own ideas and to ask for help if they need it. Pupils are not over-reliant on the teacher. They use the attractive, well-resourced and well-managed library for research and private study. Lessons are characterised by an atmosphere of quiet and purposeful activity. Pupils have an interest and enthusiasm for the subject, which increases as they get older. There are many opportunities for independent and collaborative learning, including in drama. Sixth formers are keen and confident learners.
- 112 The leadership and management of the subject are very good. There is an unequivocal commitment to raising standards. Development planning for the subject is very good, as is the degree to which the contributions of all, including governors, are valued. Targets for future developments in the subject are appropriate and are linked to measurable success criteria for teachers in order to raise achievement. Departmental documentation and guidance gives thorough attention to teaching styles and to the appropriate delegation of key tasks. There is an appropriate assessment system, which accurately measures achievements, and an effective record to track each pupil's progress as they move through the school. The department analyses data well in order to quantify progress and inform curriculum planning. The quality of accommodation is sound overall and is good in drama. Space is well used in most classes. There is good use of posters and display to foster the historical and cultural development of English and drama.
- 113 Since the last inspection good progress has been made in raising standards in English, especially at Key Stage 3 where they are about 25 per cent above the national average. GCSE language grades have also improved by about 10 per cent. The performance of boys has improved. The quality of teaching is improved, with the elements of unsatisfactory teaching seen then having been addressed completely. The number of candidates entering for the literature examination has increased. Provision is better for the lower attaining pupils. Provision for drama has improved, with pupils achieving success at both GCSE and A-level theatre studies.

## **MATHEMATICS**

- 114 In 1999 the results in national tests for pupils aged 14 were well above the national average with 79 per cent of pupils obtaining Level 5 or above compared with the national average of 62 per cent. The proportion obtaining Level 6 or above was 53 per cent compared with 38 per cent nationally. There was no significant difference in the attainment of boys and girls. Results have improved steadily in line with national trends since 1996. Teacher assessments continue to be an accurate reflection of test results. In comparison with similar schools, results in 1999 were broadly in line. In 2000 results improved to be above similar schools at both Levels 5 and 6 and were better than results in English and science.
- 115 Pupils at all levels in Key Stage 3 attain above their counterparts nationally and when teaching is at its best some attain well above. In relation to prior attainment all pupils make good progress. This is because of a consistently high standard of teaching

which is always at least satisfactory and usually good or better. The best teaching occurs when the high levels of explanation and planning are matched by well-focused tasks with clearly identified success criteria and suitable time-scales. It is in these lessons that the consistently good attitudes of the pupils are enhanced by real enthusiasm and a determination to succeed. This leads to quality learning. The introduction of the National Numeracy Strategy techniques in using starter activities and summaries in every lesson is giving an impetus to lessons. This strategy usually catches pupils' interest. Occasionally, however, when starter activities last too long they not only lose their appeal but also take attention away from the main focus of the lesson. Monitoring of teaching and learning by the head of department is helping to develop a higher standard and greater variety of techniques. Whilst teachers assess accurately and set appropriate targets for test results, these targets are not shared with pupils. The standards and quality of provision up to Year 9 are broadly in line with those in the last inspection.

- 116 Pupils with special educational needs and those with English as an additional language attain in line with other pupils within classes. The performance of one gifted pupil who has English as an additional language was exceptional in the end of key stage national tests in 2000. Those in the lowest attaining group, most of whom have special educational needs, are greatly assisted by the teacher's well-structured questioning and high expectations. In a lesson on the topic of time the teacher used good resources, constantly checking that work was at the correct level of challenge. Pupils learnt because they were focused on very clear short-term targets and received prompt feedback on their efforts.
- 117 In the GCSE examinations in 1999 64 per cent of pupils attained grades A\*-C, a result which was well above the national average of 43 per cent for Year 11 cohorts. The percentage of pupils attaining grades A\*-G was 97 per cent which was above the national average of 95 per cent. In 2000 the proportion of pupils attaining grades A\*-G was maintained at 97 per cent. The percentage of pupils attaining grades A\*-C has not improved in recent years in line with national trends and in 2000 this percentage fell to 60 per cent. The percentage of pupils gaining grade A\*, however, was 5 per cent in 2000, which is the highest ever attained by the school and well above national averages. The results show no significant difference between the performance of boys and girls. In 1999 all 14 pupils entered for GCSE statistics obtained at least grade B. This is above the national average and continued the trend of all entrants obtaining at least grade B in recent years. In 2000 11 of the 14 entrants obtained at least grade B and three obtained grade C. These results are still above the national average.
- 118 Pupils across all levels of ability are attaining above their counterparts nationally and where teaching is at its best they attain well above. In comparison to their prior attainment they achieve well and all make at least good progress from Year 9 to Year 11. One pupil who has English as an additional language is being taught extension material for GCSE in Year 10 because she attained exceptional performance in Year 9. Higher attaining pupils in Year 11 are given the opportunity to study GCSE statistics using one lunch-time a week. They are working at a level above the national average.
- 119 Pupils in Year 11 continue to show good attitudes and high standards of behaviour. Continuing high standard of teaching support this. Teaching is always at least satisfactory and usually good or better; it is often excellent. Teaching is best when a variety of methods are used to encourage pupils to think deeply about their work and the reliability of their answers. Teachers use their own individual methods of assessment to monitor progress and plan future work and this is always done

appropriately. Target grades for GCSE are decided initially using information from pupils' national tests when they were 14. This information is used to good effect in challenging pupils on an individual basis within sets. The introduction by the head of department of a process to monitor teaching and learning is already encouraging teachers to focus more deeply on the suitability of their teaching strategies.

- 120 Relationships with pupils and the working environment are always good. The determination shown by pupils to succeed, already evident in earlier years, is helped by setting across the entire year group in Years 9, 10 and 11, allowing teachers to focus on a narrower range of ability within each class. Lower ability pupils and those with special educational needs are exceptionally well taught by a member of the learning support team. Pupils are also more focused because they are now highly aware of both their current attainment from Key Stage 3 tests and their GCSE targets which teachers share with them. The head of department has negotiated for an extra class in Year 11 that allows for more accurate matching of pupils to the most appropriate level of examination entry. In general, performance in mathematics at the end of Year 11 is in line with that at the time of the previous inspection.
- 121 In 2000 results at GCE A-level were just above the 1999 national average with 7 out of 10 students obtaining grades A-C and all obtaining grades A-E. These students were the first to attempt A-level since the opening of the sixth form in 1998. In Year 13 students attain standards that are usually well above the national average. They know formulae well and are very competent when applying techniques of differentiation and integration. They know the algebraic relationship between gradients of perpendicular lines and confidently choose the correct formula in which to substitute the appropriate value. Students work with confidence and enthusiasm. They co-operate well and discuss answers thoroughly with teachers and each other. Teachers have high expectations and always ensure that students have sufficient problem solving practice. They check students' written work promptly in lessons and focus their questions extremely well to develop and test understanding prior to setting homework. Homework is well used alongside classroom observation to assess regularly and accurately. Homework is demanding but achievable because of the determination of the students and this helps build the growing confidence which students display in lessons. Students rightly have confidence in the teachers and show great respect for them.
- 122 Teaching is always very good and is characterised by good subject knowledge and the belief that students must be actively involved in lessons rather than taking notes. The teachers' prior knowledge of the students ensures not only appropriate learning activities but also enhances relationships within the classroom. The department makes a very good contribution to the development of numeracy skills. They ensure that pupils and students have the necessary skills to do numeracy work in other subjects. The progress of students in mathematics is very good and they achieve very well in relation to prior attainment. This includes students with English as an additional language. Mathematics in the sixth form has made an extremely good start. Numbers choosing the subject are steadily increasing. Results in modules already taken by current students and standards seen in lessons clearly indicate that results in the near future will improve on those in 2000. The decision to introduce further mathematics will enhance the reputation of the subject department within the school. It also typifies the determination of the newly appointed head of department to continue to seek improvement within a department that is already doing well.

## SCIENCE

- 123 Attainment was well above the national average in the 1999 tests for pupils aged 14, both for the number of pupils reaching the expected Level 5 and the higher Levels 6 and 7. This represents significant improvement since the last inspection. Compared with similar schools, the number of pupils reaching expected and higher levels was below average. Girls performed better than boys did, but both were well above the national average. Performance over four years has been well above average, but declined between 1997 and 1999. In 1999 results were below those in English and mathematics. Results in 2000 have improved. They were well above the national average and highest attaining pupils performed particularly well, with two at the highest Level 8. Performance was in line with similar schools.
- 124 The number of pupils achieving both the higher grades A-C and the expected grades A-G in GCSE examinations in 1999 was well above average. Compared with similar schools, performance was average. Boys performed better than girls, with both groups well above boys and girls nationally. Results in 2000 have been sustained well above the 1999 national average. Results are similar to those reported in the last inspection at the end of both key stages.
- 125 Most sixth form students met standards required in A-level physics, chemistry and biology in 2000. The numbers entered were small, but the percentage reaching the highest grades A and B was well above the 1999 average for chemistry, above for physics and below for biology. There is a notable increase in the number of candidates for 2001. The school's information for predicted grades and module test results shows significant potential improvement.
- 126 Work seen confirms the standards in national test and examination results. Attainment is well above average in Key Stages 3 and 4 because teachers have high expectations for pupils. In Key Stage 3, higher attaining pupils achieve high standards in knowledge and understanding and perform well in practical investigations. In Key Stage 4, work is well matched to the needs of pupils, enabling all groups to reach better than expected standards. Pupils in a low attaining set in Year 11 understand the mechanism of breathing because the teacher uses a wide range of resources to help them understand the processes involved. Others succeed in comparing the separation of dyes, using two different solvents and understanding the principles of chemical separation of complex mixtures. Those in middle sets reach good standards. Teachers explain scientific ideas very well, encouraging pupils to participate fully in discussion and expecting them to apply knowledge in relevant situations. In a physics lesson, pupils understand the relationships between pressure and area as a result of using good quality information about variation in shoe size in the class. In the sixth form, standards are good because of some exemplary teaching, with innovative programmes of work that challenge and motivate students: Year 13 chemistry students apply background knowledge of spectrometry very well in order to interpret unfamiliar graphical data from an interactive programme from industry.
- 127 Standards of literacy are very good because teachers apply good techniques to encourage pupils to use language creatively to explain scientific ideas: higher attaining pupils write of becoming a red blood cell for a day. Although in lower sets they find this more difficult, they improve with good attention to the use of correct vocabulary. Higher attaining pupils use excellent flow diagrams to show immunity to infection. Year 7 pupils use the computer to produce very good leaflets to welcome those in Year 6. In lessons where lower attaining pupils are supported well by writing frames, they work at a good pace. Where written support materials are adapted for

particular groups, they match individual needs well, particularly those with lower reading skills and those with special educational needs. Teachers emphasise key words very well, particularly in Year 7. Writing is well above average and presentation of written work is generally of a high standard.

- 128 Standards of numeracy are good. Higher attaining pupils reach very good standards in making mathematical predictions for the gain in mass when burning magnesium in oxygen. Those in lower sets reach expected standards in physics from very good teaching of wave formulae. Pupils reach very good standards in the use of information and communications technology to record and analyse experimental evidence; in Year 9, the highest set use the computer to produce graphs of changes in velocity of cars, showing clearly the variation in acceleration. Year 8 pupils in a lower set improve their skills in using a spreadsheet, quickly producing a very well presented graph to analyse information on yeast growth.
- 129 Teaching and learning are very good and have improved since the last inspection, contributing to very good achievement by pupils during their time in school. Teachers use subject expertise to challenge and motivate pupils. Year 12 biology students understand the complex molecular nature of living organisms because excellent probing questions entice them to express their views. This leads to a very high level of discussion. Year 13 physics students improve their mathematical competence through timed questions that prepare them very well for examination performance.
- 130 The teaching of investigations has improved. Pupils now acquire very good skills and are learning to be more independent because teachers foster a high sense of responsibility, expecting pupils to show initiative. Year 7 plan their own investigation for making a parachute in order to consider how gravity and air resistance affect the fall. Others become science experts in acids and alkalis because the teacher leads a very good discussion, expecting them to explain what they have planned at home. They have good practical organisational skills because they are expected to take responsibility for equipment and work at a crisp pace. Very good research skills are evident in the writing of an able pupil, who surveyed the industrial and medical application of radio-active tracers.
- 131 Teachers foster enthusiasm and hard work, leading to positive attitudes and real enjoyment of science. Pupils behave very well in lessons, responding very well to lively teaching and are serious minded about their work. They enjoy good relationships with teachers, steadily increasing in maturity. They co-operate well in teams, managing practical resources very well. They respond well to fulfilling safety procedures. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress when teachers spend time to work with them individually, praising their success. Meticulous resource preparation by teachers and technicians makes the most of pupils' time.
- 132 Assessment is good. Teachers reward pupils well, using the school system of merits. Homework is set regularly. When teachers monitor the progress of pupils whilst they are working, pupils show marked improvement of skills and knowledge. The quality of review is very good at the end of the best lessons. Work is generally marked carefully but use of targets varies between key stages. Teachers talk rigorously with students in the sixth form about how they can improve. In Key Stage 4, pupils gain good insights into their progress from module test results, monitored against their earlier achievements. In Key Stage 3, communication with pupils about their progress against National Curriculum criteria is not well established. There is currently no system for assessing pupil progress in the use of information and

communications technology.

- 133 Leadership is very good. The department reflects the aims of the school in its work to raise standards and in doing the best for pupils of all abilities. A very committed team works hard to fulfil school policies, evident in the significant development in implementing A-level courses for the new sixth form. Integration of information and communications technology into the routines of teaching is gaining momentum and much is already effective. Development of such higher order skills such as problem solving require further whole team efforts. The department is establishing more formalised systems for monitoring pupils' progress over time and is well placed to show pupils' achievements over their time in school and so improve the quality of reporting to parents. The department is in a good position to use assessment information to set challenging targets for groups of pupils and the year group as a whole and to review policy for communication of assessment criteria to pupils in Key Stage 3. Concern for equal opportunities and careful monitoring of boys' and girls' performance is very effective. New staff and newly qualified teachers are supported very well.

## ART

- 134 Standards in art have improved since the last inspection. By the age of 14 attainment is above national expectations with pupils demonstrating confident use of a range of media both in two and three dimensions. Teacher assessment indicates that boys do particularly well in comparison to the national picture. Pupils are able to make effective use of colour and a range of materials and can work at a variety of scales to realise their ideas.
- 135 Teachers have a very good range of specialist expertise and set challenging tasks that enable pupils to develop a broad range of work and experiment with different materials and processes. Tasks are well planned to develop pupils' practical skills alongside some knowledge of artwork and artistic styles. Year 9 pupils, for example, developed a range of collage and paintings based on their studies of work by Degas. In another lesson, pupils were developing their knowledge of renaissance architecture through making a card relief based on their drawings. Year 8 pupils were making very good progress developing masks as the next stage of their unit of work on faces and distortion. The teacher had provided a good range of examples and set supporting homework that helped raise awareness and improve understanding of facial features through observational drawing.
- 136 Pupils make good progress over the key stage through the work in lessons and boys in particular show very good levels of confidence in using mixed media. In a Year 9 class the teacher had set an imaginative task based around observations of folding and creasing in material. This challenged pupils who had, using collage, painting and drawing, created lively paper ties that they superimposed onto large pastel drawings of shirts. The teacher provided good progression by linking this work on folded material to imaginative landscape studies in the next unit of work, using landscapes by Dali and other surrealist art as examples.
- 137 Observation skills criticised at the previous inspection are appropriately developed in lessons. The use of a sketchbook for homework and to explore ideas and develop drawing skills is not consistently encouraged across all the teaching groups and this leads to some variation in experience and competence. This is an area that could be improved together with the use of information and communications technology.

Teachers encourage the use of the Internet for research, but there are few opportunities for pupils to use computers to develop their work.

- 138 By the age of 16 skills are very well developed, evident in the high standards achieved in the GCSE examination. In the 1999 examination half the year group entered and 76.6 per cent of pupils gained the higher A\*-C grades. The performance of the boys at 76 per cent was very high in comparison to the national average for boys. The results for the girls were just above the national average for girls. The overall pass rate in 1999 of 100 per cent for A\*-G grades was above the national average. In the 2000 examination, results have continued to improve with 82 per cent of pupils gaining the higher A\*-C grades. There has been a significant and sustained improvement in results since the previous inspection when they were just above the national average.
- 139 In lessons pupils build upon the range of skills and experiences from Key Stage 3. The quality and range of three-dimensional work is often good and pupils show growing confidence and imagination in tackling a wide range of subject matter. In Year 10 the theme of 'East meets West' had inspired an imaginative range of work based upon pupils' research. For example, in one class a pupil was building a large clay sculpture developed from studies of a pagoda whilst in another group pupils were completing collages that combined the union flag with eastern images. In a third group the focus was on developing prints based upon figures from eastern cultures. The teacher had given clear guidance on techniques and methods of working which ensured that all those involved in print-making had achieved good quality outcomes.
- 140 The quality of teachers' observations and their comments to pupils during lessons help pupils of all abilities to achieve well. Marking follows a clear framework and the criteria by which examination work will be judged are made clear to pupils, ensuring they understand how to improve. Standards in the current Year 11 are high with many examples of well-executed work in two and three dimensions. Pupils are encouraged to reflect upon their work and art from a range of times and cultures, broadening their appreciation and understanding. Attitudes to work are very good and lessons are characterised by a relaxed but purposeful atmosphere. Pupils make more regular use of a sketchbook for research and are encouraged to make use of the Internet for research and to develop ideas and this helps raise standards. For example, many pupils in a Year 10 class used images they had collected from the Internet to compare differences in the way similar subject matter had been developed by eastern and western artists.
- 141 In the sixth form standards are broadly in line with expectations with a range of grades at GCE A-level in 2000 from A to D. This was the first A-level group as part of the new sixth form and represents good achievement. Numbers opting for art are increasing and students have very mature and positive attitudes that help them achieve. Students in the current Year 13 demonstrate good development of their skills from Key Stage 4 with an imaginative and expressive range of work developed from figure studies. Observational drawing work by Year 12 indicates very good progress to date with the course and potential for high standards by the end of the course. Students have good levels of independence and use sketchbooks well to develop personal responses to a common theme. They can draw upon references to the work of artists and apply their skills in literacy to evaluate and write critically. A strong feature of the work is the confidence with which students handle large-scale work and use a mixture of media.
- 142 Leadership and management of the subject are effective with a sound belief in the

value of art for pupils of all abilities, which underpins the work of the department. With all teachers involved in the teaching at each key stage there is a shared commitment within the department. There has been an appropriate focus upon raising standards that has secured sustained improvement particularly in the work of boys. Department documentation does not yet reflect the demands of the new National Curriculum. There is also scope to improve the detail of assessment information at Key Stage 3 so that pupils are better informed about how to improve and parents can be given clear information about standards of attainment. Art is growing in popularity as an option and accommodation is under increasing pressure with the larger groups. Teachers actively encourage the use of information and communications technology but the department lacks resources to support further developments and higher standards in this area.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

- 143 In 2000, the results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were well above the national average. Results have improved considerably since 1998 and evidence of the inspection indicates that current work is above the national expectation. Standards are good because the design and technology curriculum is well structured and well taught. Pupils take part in a wide variety of suitably challenging tasks using a variety of materials. These tasks provide opportunities to develop their knowledge and skills in both designing and making. In each of the contributory design and technology subjects, pupils carry out research, produce a good range of their own ideas and develop their own solutions into final ideas, which are then well made using appropriate materials. Work varies in depth of content and quality of presentation, depending on pupils' ability, but coursework is good in all subjects. For higher ability pupils, the range of ideas and the presentation of work, including drawing skills, are very good. There is a good use of computers to enhance the presentation and content of pupils' work.
- 144 GCSE results in design and technology have improved considerably since the last inspection. In 1999, the results overall were above the national average for the proportion gaining A\*-C and the proportion gaining at least a grade G. Results for food technology and graphics products have been consistently well above the national average and in the year 2000 the upward trend continued for these subjects. The results for resistant materials rose to above the national average and the small number taking textiles were very successful. Results for those taking the short courses in design and technology are good but below those achieved for the full GCSE courses. Girls continue to achieve higher results than boys. Girls achieve standards well above the national average for A\*-C grades and gain a very high proportion of A grades. Boys achieve the national average for A\*-C grades but few achieve the higher grades. The improvement in A-G grades, with almost all pupils gaining A to G in most subjects, is a clear indication that pupils of all ability, including those with special educational needs, are using their ability well in design and technology.
- 145 Attainment in Year 11 is above national expectation. The structured approach used by all teachers to address the design process enables all pupils to organise their work, carry out research, develop their ideas and produce solutions to identified problems. Knowledge development is good. The quality of work varies with ability, but is generally good. Many pupils, whose prior attainment has been low or have special educational needs, achieve good outcomes because they are interested in the subject and use their abilities well. Drawing and graphical presentation of work are often very good and sometimes excellent. There is good use of computers both in class work and coursework and the inclusion of technological content in all courses

gives an added dimension to pupils' designing and making activities. Finished products from previous practical work indicate that all pupils develop good skills in a variety of materials and some practical outcomes are of a very high standard.

- 146 In the sixth form students gain B to E grades and achieve standards that reflect their prior attainment. Current work indicates that the well-structured course is enabling good knowledge development and a good approach to the design process. The development and use of high quality presentational skills to illustrate research, analysis and development of ideas are particularly good in Year 12. The depth and quality of coursework continue to reflect the range of students' ability, which ranges from satisfactory to very good.
- 147 When compared to their earlier attainment, pupils make good progress in design and technology throughout the school. In Year 7, pupils are quick to learn the principles of constructing and using an electronic circuit and use computers effectively to construct individual designs for the packaging of a toothbrush. Year 8 pupils develop good planning skills and good levels of knowledge about the functions of ingredients and use these very effectively in their practical work. Year 9 pupils work well in small groups to research, design and make games which include very creative ideas and apply electronic sensing circuits effectively. As pupils move through the school they are well supported by the structured approach used to address the designing and making requirements of the examination. In Years 10 and 11 pupils make significant progress in the production of good and, in many cases, very good coursework folders. Content is often well researched and presented to a very high standard in all design and technology subjects and the best work is of an excellent standard. In most lessons teachers develop aspects of technical language through oral work. Opportunities to develop numeracy skills are included through measurement, calculations of nutritional content of foods and the collection and recording of research data using graphs. Computers are becoming increasingly and effectively used to enhance the presentation and content of work. Year 10 use a computer simulation programme to construct electronic circuits and present records of the circuit output in graphical form. Years 8 and 10 use computers to generate patterns which are used to print T-shirts. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, make at least satisfactory progress and pupils of higher ability make very good progress.
- 148 Overall, teaching is good, but in Key Stage 4 it is very good. All teaching is satisfactory or better and it is frequently good or better. Teachers have a very clear understanding of the requirements of the National Curriculum and this enables them to focus their work throughout the school. All teachers have good technical knowledge, which is reflected in demonstrations and individual support to pupils in lessons. Overall planning for courses is good, particularly in Key Stage 4, but in some Key Stage 3 lessons planning is not sufficiently detailed and as a result both teaching and learning activities lack structure. In the best lessons time is used well and teachers' expectations of behaviour and performance are high. For example, very good planning prior to a Year 8 food lesson resulted in very good pupil performance from the start of the practical session with high interest and very good levels of concentration. Good assessment procedures include frequent individual advice to pupils about their work in lessons. The careful structuring of learning objectives in Key Stage 4 enables students of all abilities, including those with special educational needs, to address the tasks set very effectively. Regular assessment of pupils' work with extended written comments is very effective in enabling pupils to improve their work.

- 149 Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very good. They settle to work quickly and there is a positive culture for learning in lessons. Pupils respond well to their teachers' high expectations of behaviour and performance and are very keen to do well in their work. They concentrate very well in lessons and many spend considerable time outside of lessons in improving their work. They work well together in group projects and appreciate the contributions being made by others to the project.
- 150 Design and technology courses provide good access to the National Curriculum and all statutory requirements are met. Overall planning is good, but there could be more detailed planning for the progressive delivery of literacy, numeracy and use of computers in planned schemes of work. Leadership and management are good with close co-operation and good use of teachers' individual talents in planning for and delivery of departmental objectives. There is a very positive approach to monitoring the development and improvement of the subject but more could be done to monitor teaching and share good practice. Development plans are good but some objectives of the technology college bid, such as providing a full design technology course for all Key Stage 4 pupils and extending industrial and community links, have yet to be implemented. Accommodation for design and technology has improved significantly but the dual use of one room for both food preparation and textiles is a potential health and safety risk.
- 151 Standards have improved substantially since the last inspection. The department is well led and a very well structured approach to the delivery of design and technology is developing across the school. Accommodation and access to resources have improved considerably, GCSE grades have improved and teaching is now very effective.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

- 152 By the age of 14 attainment, judged by national assessment in 2000, is above national averages. Standards have improved over the last three years because of good teaching. Attainment in GCSE examination in 1999 was well above that for all secondary schools, 72 per cent of pupils achieved A\*-C grades; the national average was 53.1 per cent. There has been an improvement, with some fluctuations, in GCSE performance between 1996 and 1999, although there was a slight decline in 2000. There are no national averages to compare the 2000 results. All students gained A\*-G grades in 1999, well above the national figure. Whilst both boys and girls attain results that are better than the national average, girls' attainment is better than that of boys, in line with national trends. Very good teaching is the key factor in these improvements. Attainment in A-level examinations cannot be compared with national averages as the examination was first taken in 2000. The average points score for the subject shows commendable attainment for the first year.
- 153 Overall, geography teaching is very good. Across the school the qualities of teaching and the powerful pupil response are a strong influence on the way pupils learn. Planning to address learning objectives through a series of brief, stimulating activities is a consistently strong feature of lessons at all stages. At all key stages pupils' response to geography is unfailingly positive. Pupils have very good classroom routines, so that no time is wasted when moving from one activity to another. Teachers capitalise on pupils' strong attitudes in planning lessons, so there are many very good examples of pair and group work.
- 154 Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above national expectations. Pupils in Year 7 can distinguish between human and physical geography and can identify

geographical features from photographs. In Year 9 many know how to make links between human activity and environmental change and can evaluate the potency of various elements which create environmental damage. Knowledge of place is only satisfactory because teaching does not place sufficient emphasis on the location of many of the studies that are done. Teaching and learning are good because teachers have good knowledge of their subject and pupils are well managed. Lessons have a purposeful air and proceed at a good pace. They have a range of interesting activities to help maintain interest. A very good Year 9 lesson on how deserts are created had clearly expressed aims, very good resources and a relentless pace. There were a variety of interesting tasks that developed learning very effectively. Pupils' attitudes are very positive; they are mature, and work with concentration and great independence. The strengths of their personal relationships are such that groups work exceptionally well together, to the considerable benefit of their learning. Although teaching is strong there are some minor weaknesses in teaching; introductions and plenary sessions are sometimes hurried and so are rendered less effective.

- 155 Pupil attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is well above expectations. Year 11 pupils know the main forms of life in tropical rain forests. They have good skills in balancing strengths and weaknesses in considering controversial issues such as where to site a factory. Because lessons often encourage the exchange of ideas and the pooling of views, pupils can balance strengths and weaknesses when they are discussing geographical issues. Their factual recall is not so good and sometimes handicaps their rate of learning. Teaching is very good because all teachers have good subject knowledge and are aware of the demands of examination work; they manage pupils well. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and academic performance and pupils invariably live up to the expectations. The enthusiasm of teachers helps to encourage progress. A very good Year 11 lesson exemplified these strengths: rigorous teaching, urgent pace and very high expectations, aided by a good pupil response, ensured that all made very good progress in considering the nature of vegetation in tropical rain forests. Pupils react to the subject with maturity. They show good focus on the task in hand. The quality of pupils' attitudes and behaviour has a significant impact on the pace of their learning; it means that teachers can let pupils take responsibility for their work and collaborate in their own learning. Work in small groups, which encourages close collaboration between pupils, is used very effectively throughout the school.
- 156 In lessons, sixth form pupils' attainment is above national averages. Pupils in Year 13 show good research skills. In a very good lesson on natural hazards, pupils showed good understanding of the causes, nature and possible prevention of a range of hazards. In presenting their findings to the rest of the class, most of them were lucid in their explanations, using the good quality visual aids which they had prepared. They used geographical vocabulary well. Teaching of geography in the sixth form is very good. It is characterised by good subject knowledge and friendly relationships. Teachers have high expectations so that pupils in the early part of their A-level course are given precise guidance to help develop their essay writing techniques. In a good Year 12 lesson on examination techniques, the session had been carefully planned and the teacher maintained a strong focus on the learning objectives throughout. The lesson had good pace and, because the work on improving the quality of geographical essay writing was strongly relevant to pupils, it gained a very good response. Pupils respond well, working with energy and application; their rate of learning is good. They start the course with varying levels of prior knowledge. By Year 13 teaching has enabled pupils to develop the breadth of knowledge, understanding and skills required for success in A-level examinations. The pace of sixth form learning is good. Throughout the school

pupils with special educational needs make progress consistent with their individual education plans.

- 157 The curriculum is satisfactorily planned. However, the school does not give pupils enough practical experiences of the subject through fieldwork, particularly in Key Stage 3. Information and communications technology is taught through the subject on occasions and plans show an increasing awareness of its value in teaching geography. While literacy and numeracy skills are developed in geography lessons, the department does not plan them in formally. The pattern of assessment of geography is satisfactory, but results are not recorded centrally and are not sufficiently analysed to feed back into the classroom. Sixth form students and Key Stage 4 pupils know what their predicted examination grades are and have target grades, but do not know how to improve their performance, except in the most general terms. The head of department monitors teaching and marking and good practice is consistent across all staff.
- 158 Since the last inspection standards at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4 have improved greatly. Standards of teaching have improved, but there has been too little development in the assessment of the subject.

## **HISTORY**

- 159 This is a very good department that offers all pupils a rich curriculum experience and a very high quality of teaching. Pupils achieve high standards.
- 160 By the age of 14 levels of attainment are well above the national average. The 2000 teacher assessments show that 81 per cent of pupils gained Level 5 or above, with little significant difference between boys and girls. Pupils show a very good range and depth of knowledge and understanding of the events, people and situations studied, together with an appropriate historical vocabulary. They are able to place events within a chronological framework, using timelines and historical conventions. They show a very good understanding of historical ideas such as change and causation, as in their work on religious changes in the sixteenth century and the varied causes of the First World War. They can comprehend and use sources but fewer pupils show that they can analyse sources in depth. A major strength is the quality of their extended writing. By Year 9 the majority are writing fluently in response to demanding essay questions; for example, they examine the causes of serious unrest and discontent in France in the 1780's and explain why the Revolution broke out. Lower ability pupils are well supported by good writing frames and all pupils make drafts of their work. Most pupils are able to use books and CD-ROMs to gather information for their mini-research tasks, which are often presented effectively, using word-processing programmes. There is less evidence of substantial historical investigation using a guiding question to focus investigation. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, are making very good progress.
- 161 These high standards are maintained and built upon in both the long and the short history examination courses. By Year 11 pupil attainment continues to be well above that seen in similar schools. This judgement is supported by recent GCSE results where, in 1999, 82.5 per cent of pupils gained A\*-C grades and a similar very high standard was achieved in 2000. There are no significant differences in the attainment of boys and girls. A\* grades have been under-represented in the very good results of these two years.
- 162 Over the two-year examination courses, pupils acquire a good level of knowledge and understanding, demonstrated in the revision lessons observed. They have a

working historical vocabulary and accurately use words such as 'communism' or 'totalitarianism'. They have a very good grasp of historical ideas, as in their work on the causes and results of the Berlin blockade, and lower ability pupils, for example, have a good understanding of the ideological implications of a students' timetable in Nazi Germany. Many pupils write fluently both in a descriptive and explanatory way as in their work on World War Two. Most pupils comprehend a range of sources and use them critically to reach and support judgements. This was best seen in their demanding coursework on the League of Nations and the United Nations where even the lower ability pupils were producing thoughtful work on the relative successes and failures, often presented effectively using computers. Pupils are able to research material, as in Year 10 where pupils collected information on America in the 1920's, using books, the school's Intranet and the wider Internet. All pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress.

- 163 Attainment in the sixth form is good. Pairs of Year 13 students gave well-researched presentations on aspects of the history of Britain 1939-1945. Essays are well written. Year 12 students showed a good knowledge of detail and a good grasp of complex and subtle ideas as they debated whether the Labour government of 1945-51 was socialist or not. Most showed a good level of oral attainment at this early stage of the course. Examination results for the year 2000 show all eight students gained grades A-E with two thirds of them gaining the highest grades A and B.
- 164 Pupils' response to learning across the school is very good. Pupils listen to the teacher and show high levels of concentration. They show much interest and work on task for long periods. They are developing some initiative and independence through homework, the mini-research activities and the demanding examination coursework.
- 165 The teaching of history across the school is either good or very good. Specialist teachers show a high level of historical knowledge and have a good understanding of how pupils learn. There are three major strengths to the teaching. Firstly, the teachers structure lessons to help build pupils' understanding. In a Year 8 lesson on the reasons for the failure of the Spanish Armada the pupils were taken through an account of 1587 and in pairs were required to read a demanding text. To ensure focussed work they had to underline reasons associated with the weather, luck, Philip's mistakes, planning, English skill, opportunism. This would build later to a written account. In a Year 9 lesson on sources, groups were asked to suggest some key questions which they would use to gather information from a range of photographs showing fighting in World War One. Pupils classified the information they had gathered into topic areas, which became the basis of extended writing.
- 166 Secondly, the teachers offer good support to individuals. They match the tasks to the needs of pupils, as in a Year 7 class on Imperial China. They use different levels of textbook with different ability groups. They use writing frames to support the work of the lower attainers. Pupils' work is regularly marked with helpful comments. They offer good support to whole year groups as in the well-planned revision lessons preceding the trial GCSE examination.
- 167 Thirdly, teachers challenge pupils to achieve. In a Year 10 lesson pupils used simulation-modelling software both to make decisions as if they were British politicians wanting to avoid war in the 1930's and to make decisions as if they were German politicians of the same period. This was a challenging activity involving the application of previous knowledge, a high level of thinking and the ability to work at some pace. By the time students reach the sixth form teachers challenge them to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding through presentation and debate.

Teachers could challenge pupils further in Year 9 by asking them to analyse sources in depth and could support the lower prior attainers more in Year 11 through continued use of descriptive and explanatory writing frames.

- 168 The departmental team is well led and managed by an able and experienced head of department. Detailed newly revised schemes of work underpin the history curriculum. The department provides a rich history experience, offering pupils opportunities to visit places of historical interest, to research and to use information and communications technology in their learning. There is in place a good assessment system, but this needs to be aligned more explicitly to National Curriculum criteria. This would allow progress to be measured more rigorously, allow pupils to set themselves subject specific targets and give more detailed information about attainment and progress to parents. There is a good development plan for improvement. All teachers' work is monitored by the head of department through lesson observations.
- 169 Since the previous inspection the department has improved its GCSE results to the current high level. The quality of teaching has improved to be consistently good and very good.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY**

- 170 There has been considerable development of information and communications technology since the time of the previous inspection. Pupils now have good access to computers to support learning and the levels of confidence and independent use of information and communications technology by pupils and students across the school are good. Standards have improved.
- 171 Teaching of separate information and communications technology is very good and characterised by thorough planning of tasks. This ensures very good progress. The expectation is that pupils will apply and develop their skills across the subjects of the curriculum by Year 9. By the age of 14 standards of attainment overall are above expectations. Teacher assessment for July 2000 indicates a similar judgement on standards.
- 172 The use of information and communications technology for presentation of work is particularly good with pupils able to edit, draft and redraft to achieve high quality in their work. Skills are well taught and as a result pupils are familiar with a range of software, confident in their use and willingly access the school network independently to support their learning. They can, for example, use computers to create a newsletter or to present their work and can select appropriate software to solve problems and investigate information. In science, they can use a spreadsheet to record, display and interpret data; in geography, they record and compare the results of surveys. They make good use of modelling and design software to support a range of work in design and technology. Pupils learn to make use of the Internet for research and many develop their general knowledge and information and communications technology skills by using the school network during lunch-time and before and after school.
- 173 Pupils make progress because lessons are well-structured and a range of opportunities are provided by many subjects across the curriculum. Pupils have very positive attitudes to using computers and this also promotes good achievement. Pupils with special educational needs also achieve as a result of good teaching that makes effective use of computers to support their learning. There are fewer opportunities across the curriculum to make use of a database or develop the use of

e-mail and this is a weaker aspect of attainment for most pupils. A significant number of pupils use a computer at home and this supports their learning.

- 174 By the age of 16 standards overall are in line with expectations with a particular strength being high standards in the use of information and communications technology to present and organise work. A small number of pupils in Year 11 are completing a GNVQ information technology course and standards of work are good. Pupils consolidate their learning from Key Stage 3 and progress in developing and applying skills is satisfactory. It is good in GNVQ courses because pupils make regular use of computers to support and develop their work. Pupils get some information and communications technology lessons on a rotational basis in Year 10 and this results in general levels of competence that are appropriate but infrequency of experience across the subjects of the curriculum does slow progress at higher levels.
- 175 Pupils have very positive attitudes when given opportunities to use information and communications technology in other subjects and for their own work at break and lunch-times. Other subjects of the curriculum are making increasing use of computers to support and consolidate learning and in the best lessons, for example in science and design and technology, the good match of task and challenge develops understanding and helps progress at higher levels. In Year 10, for example, pupils created high quality booklets on printing that included a range of illustrations as part of their work in design and technology. In geography, pupils extended their knowledge of earthquakes by using the school Intranet to access resources provided by the teachers. In a Year 10 history lesson, the teacher used modelling and simulation software which motivated pupils and consolidated their understanding of issues surrounding World War Two. In mathematics, pupils' learning was enhanced by the use of graphing software to explore quadratic equations. As at Key Stage 3, many pupils develop their skills through independent use of computers at home.
- 176 In the sixth form, students are able to make good use of information and communications technology to support their work. Standards are good and there is continued development of skills through the 'Futures' course to ensure all students have the necessary skills to support their work. Students have very good access to the school network. In GNVQ courses, students make regular use of computers in their work, developing skills, for example, in the use of a spreadsheet to create a profit and loss balance sheet. In science, all physics course materials are on the school network and teachers and students make very effective and regular use of this facility. Those studying physical education can access course materials from CD-ROMs, in addition to using a textbook. Very effective independent use is made of the school network by Year 13, for example, in the completion of personal statements and applications to higher education establishments.
- 177 Overall the teaching of information and communications technology is strong because those teachers involved have good subject knowledge that enables them to plan and teach appropriate skills. Many staff in other areas of the curriculum also have good skill levels which enable them to make effective use of computers to promote learning in their subject area. Teachers' knowledge and appropriate use of information and communications technology is particularly good in the sixth form for physics and enables students to make very good progress with their learning. A weaker aspect of teaching is the day-to-day assessment of work and monitoring of progress across the curriculum. Improvement in this area will enable teachers to plan appropriately and reports to parents to be more informative about attainment and progress. Considerable time has been invested in developing staff skills with

further training opportunities identified. Developments have been carefully monitored with a willingness to reflect upon the standards achieved and a strong commitment to continued improvement.

- 178 The recently appointed co-ordinator has worked hard to establish a more coherent and consistent approach to delivery and development of information and communications technology at Key Stage 3 with assessment, highlighted at the previous inspection, still an area for further development. There is a clear vision of the place of information and communications technology in the school that is shared with senior management and the technology college co-ordinator. This vision and a shared commitment are being developed with subject teachers through cross-curricular information and communications technology groups and staff training, with many good examples of effective use of information and communications technology developing across the curriculum. There is further scope to extend the range and frequency of opportunities across many subject areas and raise levels of challenge. The school network and resources are of good quality and are managed efficiently by a systems manager and technician. The ratio of computers is above the national average and this, together with the open access policy for these resources, has a very positive impact upon attitudes and standards.

## **MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES**

- 179 The modern languages department is a very successful department. All pupils begin to study French in Year 7. In Year 8, one group begins to learn Russian while all the other pupils start Spanish. In Year 10, pupils can choose which languages to follow to GCSE. All three languages are available for pupils to study to A-level in the sixth form.
- 180 Pupils' attainment by the age of 14 is well above the national average. In almost all lessons, teachers make very good use of the language that pupils are learning to give instructions and explanations. As a result, almost all pupils can understand the language spoken at nearly normal speed. They are given good opportunities to listen to taped conversations and show good understanding of longer dialogues in the languages they are learning. In all lessons the departmental reward system of 'ticks' building up to give merits is used well by teachers to encourage pupils to speak. Some pupils spontaneously use the language to communicate with the teacher, for example, to apologise for arriving late or to ask for explanations of words they do not know. Exercises to practise speaking are particularly well prepared by teachers and give pupils very good opportunities to take part in longer conversations in the language. A well-planned wide range of different activities makes pupils very familiar with new words and structures before they begin to write them. They thus have a good understanding of what they are writing. Most pupils are able to write extended passages in the language, for example about where they spent their holidays. Teachers pay appropriate attention to grammar to enable pupils to begin to use the language more flexibly.
- 181 Because lessons are so well structured and contain a variety of activities which pupils find interesting and enjoyable, all pupils, including those with special educational needs, make very good gains in their learning in Years 7 to 9. They concentrate well in lessons and work hard. In Russian and Spanish they learn enough in two years to be able to start an examination course with confidence.
- 182 Results in GCSE in French in 1999 were well above the national average, with a very high proportion of A\* and A grades. Boys' results were lower than those of girls, but

this difference was less than is usual in other schools. In 2000, the percentage of pupils gaining A\*-C grades fell, although remaining well above the 1999 national average. This can be explained by the fact that staff absence resulted in some pupils having a number of different teachers during the course. Over the last three years, the trend in results has generally shown an improvement. Spanish and Russian have not been available to all pupils in the past. Results have been very well above national averages. Almost all pupils taking Russian in the last three years have gained A\*-C grades, with a high proportion of A\* and A grades. The numbers taking Spanish have been growing significantly, but here again most pupils have gained A\*-C grades, with a high proportion of A\* and A grades.

- 183 In Years 10 and 11, teachers prepare pupils very thoroughly for the examination. This is especially true of the writing element, where they are well taught to adapt model answers to produce written work of a high standard. The highest attaining pupils are gaining a sound understanding of grammar, which is helping them to write more independently. For some average and higher attaining pupils, speaking, particularly pronunciation, is a weakness. At times, teachers do not correct this poor pronunciation routinely in lessons to help pupils to improve. In some lessons, teachers do not speak as much of the language they are teaching as they might and this deprives pupils of good models to imitate to improve their speaking. It also accounts, in part, for listening being a weaker skill for many pupils. Some teachers are giving pupils helpful extra listening exercises to do in their own time to improve their performance.
- 184 Pupils make very good progress in their learning in languages in Years 10 and 11. This is due to their good attitudes to learning, varied and interesting lessons and the good materials teachers provide to help pupils with both coursework and revision for examinations.
- 185 Students took A-level examinations in languages for the first time in 2000. As yet no national averages for this year are available for comparison, but results were below the national averages for 1999 in terms of numbers of students gaining grades A-B, and those gaining A-E grades in French and Russian. They were above average in terms of A-E grades in Spanish. Generally the results in each of the subjects were below the grades students could have been expected to attain given their performance in the GCSE. The school's analysis of the results confirms that teachers' lack of experience was a contributory factor to this. There were also some less motivated students whose attitudes affected those of others. Observation of Year 12 French lessons shows that students have been able to gain high grades in the GCSE by working hard given the thorough preparation and revision materials provided by their teachers, referred to above. The department is aware of this and is now focussing in Year 12 on a thorough revision of basic grammar.
- 186 Standards in Year 13 are above average in all three languages and students are making good gains in their learning and working in line with their potential as evidenced by their grades in the GCSE. They read a wide range of texts including literature, articles and materials from the Internet. Teachers have thus ensured that they have learned the vocabulary and structures necessary to write at length on topics of interest such as feminism. Teachers have devised interesting ways of teaching and revising grammar. In one lesson, the teacher used the format of the television quiz 'Who wants to be a millionaire?' to revise verbs in French. This gave students a real impetus to answer questions and to do their best to make sure their answers were correct and turned what could have been a very boring, although vitally important, exercise into fun for the students. They all concentrated hard and the lesson proceeded at a very good pace.

- 187 It is clear from the description above that high levels of attainment stem from much good quality teaching. Teaching was at least satisfactory in all lessons and in most it was good. It was very good or excellent in almost half of lessons. All teachers have a good command of the languages they teach. They know the pupils they teach well and there are very good relationships throughout. They have high expectations of all their pupils who respond positively to the challenges offered to them. Where support staff are available in lessons for pupils with special educational needs, the lesson is planned with them so that they can give the maximum help to the pupils they are supporting. Teachers make particularly good use of information and communications technology in preparing high quality teaching materials. Homework is used well to support the work begun in class.
- 188 The day-to-day use of assessment is sound and there are good examples of teachers setting specific targets for improvement in some exercise books. Tests at the ends of units of work are used well to assess progress. However, the results of these assessments are not used to give pupils and their parents a clear view of pupils' strengths and weaknesses in the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, and they are not passed on by teachers from year to year. Reports to parents do not give a sufficiently clear picture of what pupils know, understand and can do, and what they might do to improve still further. The newly appointed head of department is aware of this and has plans in place for a much better system of record-keeping.
- 189 The department has a very good programme of visits and exchanges to France, Spain and Russia to give pupils the opportunity to use their languages and to experience life in the country. Very recently the school has begun to employ languages assistants for a few hours each week to allow students in the sixth form access to a native speaker of the language they are studying. The time they are available is barely satisfactory for the sixth form. Apart from taking part in the visits mentioned above, pupils in the main school do not have the opportunity to work with native speakers of their foreign languages, as required by the National Curriculum. The school does not give enough consideration to the employment of languages' assistants. Since the time of the last inspection there have clearly been significant improvements in teaching which have led to pupils showing greater interest in and enjoyment of lessons, and higher standards of attainment. All pupils now study two languages in Years 8 and 9 and thus can choose which language to follow to GCSE. A new teaching block has been built for languages and the excellent facilities and the good use teachers make of display provide a very good atmosphere for learning.

## MUSIC

- 190 In 1999 the proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades A\*-C at GCSE was well above the national average. Results for 2000 show a slight fall in the number of pupils achieving A\*-C. Because of the small entry numbers, comparison with national figures are not statistically reliable. Since the last inspection, results have fluctuated and are affected by the size of the group and by the range of pupils' attainment. However, results have not fallen below the national average for any year.
- 191 During the inspection there was insufficient evidence on which to base a judgement about pupils' attainment by the age of 14. This was because there were no recordings of pupils' composing and performing work from the previous academic year. In the lessons observed, standards of attainment are in line with national expectations. In a Year 9 lesson pupils played a simple reggae accompaniment on

keyboards successfully co-ordinating both hands. However, pupils lack knowledge and understanding of staff notation and are too reliant on having the letter names stuck on the keyboard. Evidence of recently tape-recorded work shows that pupils are developing good ensemble skills and when composing they can successfully develop their musical ideas within a chord structure. Pupils' vocal skills are underdeveloped. The new head of department has already begun to address this through the planning in schemes of work and the production of a department song book which has already become popular with pupils. For example, in a Year 7 lesson pupils successfully maintained an independent part when singing 'Swing low, sweet chariot' in two parts. Higher attaining pupils, who are often those receiving instrumental lessons, are achieving above expectations. No difference was observed between the attainment of girls and boys. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve well in lessons and make good progress. This is because of the strengths of the teaching and the good attitudes and behaviour of the pupils.

- 192 By the age of 16, pupils' attainment is above national expectations. In Year 11 pupils' attainment in composing and performing is above average. In a GCSE lesson they were able to apply their knowledge and understanding of chords to learning how compound chords are formed. Listening skills are underdeveloped and again the head of department has put strategies in place to improve these. In Year 10 pupils show good knowledge and understanding of technical terms. Their attainment for listening is above average. Most pupils taking GCSE in Years 10 and 11 receive instrumental or singing tuition and this has a very positive impact on all aspects of their GCSE work. Pupils achieve very well in lessons and make very good progress. This is because of the very good teaching and well-motivated pupils.
- 193 A-level music was introduced for the first time in September 2000 and the eight students currently following the course achieve very well in lessons. In a Year 12 lesson students identified the characteristics of minimalist music and then used instruments or music sequencing software on computer, effectively and appropriately, to explore different melodic and rhythmic patterns for their own minimalist compositions.
- 194 Pupils show good attitudes and their behaviour is very good. They work co-operatively when sharing keyboards and when working together in groups. They listen with interest to performances by other members of the class. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and teachers are very good. Pupils are courteous and use instruments with care.
- 195 The quality of teaching is good overall. It ranges from satisfactory to very good. This is an improvement on the previous inspection. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use their own instrumental and vocal expertise effectively to help pupils learn. Challenging and well focused questioning, particularly related to listening activities, leads pupils to increase their knowledge and understanding of the features heard in the music and of musical terms. Teachers' high expectations lead to pupils making good gains with their keyboard and singing skills. Lessons are well planned with varied and well-chosen activities, which result in pupils being very interested in their work and staying on task. However, specific learning objectives for the lesson are not always clearly communicated to pupils who then are not always clear about what they should be learning and why. Tasks set by teachers match pupils' different levels of attainment. However, tasks and materials are not always sufficiently adapted to challenge higher attaining pupils in particular. Consequently, these pupils do not always make sufficient gains in their learning by the end of the lesson.

- 196 The new head of department has very clear ideas for the development of music in the school and has already made a good start in implementing them. The music curriculum provides good opportunities for pupils to develop their skills and interests but currently does not include enough opportunities to use information and communications technology in Years 7 to 9. Procedures for assessing and recording pupils' work are satisfactory. However, modules of work do not include specific assessment criteria for each assessment task to ensure that teachers apply the same criteria and inform pupils of what they need to do to achieve a particular grade or mark. As yet, there are no arrangements in place for effective monitoring of the teaching and learning both in class music lessons and in instrumental and singing lessons.
- 197 Since the previous inspection, more tuned and untuned percussion instruments have been purchased. The recently acquired computers are being effectively used for composing in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. However, at the moment the department cannot meet the requirements for information and communications technology at Key Stage 3 because there are not enough computers and keyboards. Those that exist are not powerful enough.. The movement between rooms, necessary because of the lack of appropriate resources in each classroom, is unsatisfactory and has a negative impact on the development of pupils' keyboard and composing skills in particular. The department still does not have enough space for composing and ensemble work. This was an issue raised at the previous inspection that has not been dealt with yet.
- 198 Extra-curricular provision is very good and has a very positive effect on developing pupils' performing skills. Instrumental tuition provides opportunities for pupils to learn to sing or to play a wide range of instruments. A growing number of pupils participate in the wide range of activities such as Soul Band, Jazz band, Senior Orchestra and choir, which take place at lunch-time or after school. School concerts and the school production, which will be *Bugsy Malone* next term, provide further opportunities.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

- 199 In 1999, 86 per cent of students gained A\*-C grades in GCSE which is significantly above the national average, currently at 51 per cent. Rates for A\*-C passes have been significantly higher than the national average since 1997. The first cohort of students to take A-level in 2000 gained 62.5 per cent of A-B passes against a national average of 23.9 per cent.
- 200 By the time pupils reach the age of 14 attainment is good. Eighty-five per cent of pupils are attaining at or above expected levels. There is very little non-participation in classes, largely because teachers plan lessons carefully, identify clear objectives and share them with pupils. Lessons always start promptly and proceed at a good pace with all pupils showing clear purpose and enjoyment. All teachers are specialist trained and have good knowledge that reflects in confidently delivered lessons. Boys and girls attain well and pupils with special educational needs attain well in terms of their prior achievements. Good performances were seen in games and swimming. In a swimming session taken at a large community pool the standard of swimming was high. Almost all pupils swim confidently. Attention is carefully given to the very few pupils who have difficulties with swimming. There is clear progress in the development of both stroke and survival techniques by all pupils at all levels of ability, boys, girls and pupils with special educational needs. Boys make very good

progress in rugby where very clear and structured teaching enables them quickly to understand new techniques and tactics. In gymnastics, pupils bear their body weight on their arms and hold balances. Varied styles of teaching encourage pupils to devise their own sequences of work. There is, however, still room for improvement in understanding and applying body tension in gymnastics, a shortcoming commented upon in the previous inspection report.

- 201 In Key Stage 4, lessons proceed with pace and purpose. Pupils' behaviour is always very good and improvements in performance are again clearly evident. In basketball pupils' enthusiasm and good teaching mean that defensive and attacking strategies improve. Again boys, girls and pupils with special educational needs progress well. In badminton, racket skills are sound with many students showing consistency because there are carefully structured practices in lessons. Competition, carefully introduced, motivates pupils well. GCSE students, boys and girls, produce very good written and practical work. Written work is of a high standard with very good presentation and spelling. Teachers mark work thoroughly and promptly. Students' files are very well organised, as a result of the department's careful policy on presentation.
- 202 Sixth form students, boys and girls, show very good knowledge. They discuss issues enthusiastically, identify salient points and confidently articulate opinions. Again, standards of presentation are very good. A significant number of students use information and communications technology for homework and teachers actively encourage A-level students to use the Internet for information retrieval. All students are provided with a CD-ROM to supplement standard course texts. Good understanding of theoretical concepts was seen. Students acquire good understanding of information processing in the central nervous system and quickly move from simple to complex models. A strong feature of teaching in the sixth form is meticulous lesson preparation and very careful setting of homework, deliberately intended to consolidate and develop students' learning. Marking of homework is very good. It is up to date and contains necessary information to help students improve their performance. A-level students attend revision courses, provided by a local consortium of schools in the area, which are delivered by nationally recognised experts.
- 203 At all ages, students' and pupils' attitudes are very good and sometimes excellent. They clearly enjoy physical education and remain involved and interested throughout lessons. They arrive promptly and always dress appropriately. When teachers allow opportunities there is good co-operation and collaboration which facilitates understanding, progress and attainment. Pupils answer teachers' questions eagerly and enthusiastically. There is very good uptake of the extra-curricular activities provided by the department.
- 204 Since the previous inspection there has been good progress in putting right the weaknesses identified. Basic skills are now carefully taught. Boys' efforts cannot now be faulted and their progress is good. Reporting to parents, however, still does not give a clear picture of pupils' attainment and progress against national standards. Target setting is not well developed to help pupils reach standards to which they might aspire other than in examination courses. Adjustments to the timetable since the last inspection have eliminated the problem of unbalanced teaching groups.
- 205 Management and administration are very good and teachers work within a corporate spirit. All are involved in policy decisions. A representative from the governing body also attends departmental meetings. Accommodation is good, although there is not enough storage space and office and changing accommodation for staff is too small

and cramped. There is no dedicated teaching space for examination courses. The department's only computer is not networked.

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION**

- 206 There have been no public examination entries in this subject since 1997, when the small cohort of pupils for GCSE achieved results well above national standards. By the age of 14 pupils are achieving standards in line with expectations linked to the locally agreed syllabus. In the higher attaining sets, the standards are higher than those expected. These achievements occur because of the high expectations of teachers and the positive attitudes of the pupils.
- 207 On entry to the school, many pupils have a limited knowledge and understanding of the subject, but soon make rapid advances. In all ability groups, they acquire a sound grasp of the basic tenets of Christianity and other major world religions. This was shown to very good effect in a Year 9 lesson, during which pupils investigated the beliefs and practices of Buddhism through a video taken by the teacher during a visit to a temple. The subsequent discussion was very impressive in its detail and maturity. Speaking and listening skills are good in all ability groups. Pupils are well able to debate spiritual and moral issues with confidence.
- 208 In Years 10 and 11, curriculum time for religious education is very limited and this results in low levels of attainment, which are below the expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. The statutory requirements for religious education in Key Stage 4 are not met and pupils cannot build on the subject skills that have been developed successfully at an earlier stage. In the sixth form, there is no subject specialist provision for religious education and the time allocated for the subject within the general studies programme is very limited.
- 209 The quality of teaching is never less than satisfactory and is mostly good or very good. Classroom organisation is strong and very sound subject knowledge is used effectively to give pupils confidence in their learning. Lessons are planned very well and learning objectives are outlined clearly at the start. Pupils are also provided with the opportunity to reflect on their progress at the end of most lessons, but this good practice is not consistent across the department. The previous inspection report noted a limited range of learning experiences and teaching styles within the department. This is no longer the case. Teaching in the subject is lively and enthusiastic, with a wide range of techniques that support pupils' learning. This was demonstrated very well in a Year 7 lesson, during which the story of Noah was examined in detail, using class discussion, storyboards, written tasks and Bible study. A sense of rigour and purpose pervades most lessons and this adds considerable impetus to the learning process. There is a strong emphasis on literacy throughout the curriculum and pupils are encouraged, from the outset, to use subject terminology in oral and written work. Higher attaining pupils show considerable maturity in classroom debate, but they need more opportunities to develop their writing skills in depth. Lower attaining pupils, and those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress, although their work is sometimes poorly presented.
- 210 Pupils behave very well and have a positive attitude in lessons. There is a strong rapport between teachers and pupils based on mutual respect and the pupils are eager and willing to contribute to classroom debate. This was shown very effectively in a Year 8 lesson in which pupils discussed the conversion of Saul, relating this to defining moments in their own lives. They respond very well to teachers' expectations and can use their knowledge to reflect on their own beliefs, thus

addressing another issue raised in the previous inspection.

- 211 The department is managed well and there is a strong teaching team to support pupils' learning. Marking is now more consistent but assessment techniques are not sufficiently developed in the areas of target setting and in the monitoring of pupils' progress. The department makes a very strong contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils within the school and visiting speakers are used regularly to support the curriculum. There is a plentiful supply of resources and information and communications technology is used increasingly but has not yet made a strong impact on the work of the department.
- 212 Overall, good progress has been made since the previous inspection and most of the issues raised in that report have been addressed. There are, however, very limited opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding of religious education beyond the age of 14, and the time allocated for the subject thereafter is inadequate for the effective coverage of the locally agreed syllabus. There is, therefore, an urgent need to raise the profile of the subject within the school in order to give pupils their full entitlement to religious education and to build upon the undoubted progress being made at the earlier stage.

## **VOCATIONAL EDUCATION**

- 213 The school offers the possibility of choosing some courses in vocational education to pupils in Years 10 and 11 and students in the sixth form. These are courses that are more directly related to developing the skills pupils or students might need to use and apply in their working lives.
- 214 These courses are well planned and taught, motivate pupils and students and lead to very good attainment. At the time of the last inspection the school was criticised for not making sufficient provision for the assessment and certification of the achievement of lower attaining pupils. Most of these vocational courses are designed to cater for pupil or students of all levels of attainment and are thus very appropriate for lower attaining pupils.

### ***The programme in Years 10 and 11***

- 215 Attainment in business education is very good. In 1999, the proportion of pupils attaining grades A\*-C was well above the national average. The results in 2000 improved and a further 8 per cent of pupils attained an A\*-C grades. Pupils' work in Year 11 is of a similarly high standard.
- 216 Attainment in health and social care is very good. In 1999, half of the group of pupils attained passes at intermediate level, all with merit or distinction. The other half of the group all achieved at least a pass at foundation level, most achieved a merit and one achieved a distinction. In 2000, the results were of a similar high standard. The work of pupils in Year 11 indicates similar levels of attainment.
- 217 Leisure and tourism and manufacturing are courses that are new to the school. They were introduced in September 2000. Both are being taught at foundation level and the work pupils have done so far is in line with the requirements of the course.
- 218 Teaching throughout the programme generally helps to ensure attainment is good. It is always satisfactory, generally good and at times very good or excellent. Teachers plan their lessons very well, linked to the demands of the course. For example, in a

series of health and social care lessons pupils were studying a topic concerning drugs and their impact on society. They entertained a visitor to the school who was an expert in drugs education who works with young people in the local community. In the lessons prior to meeting their visitor they learned how to get the most from the visit. This included meeting and greeting the visitor, arranging the room to ensure effective participation in a question and answer session and research to ensure that they asked the questions they wanted the answers to. The pupils took charge of the session while the teacher remained in the background ready to support or intervene as necessary. As a result, pupils demonstrated maturity, they asked appropriate questions, the learning that took place excited them and this ensured very good attainment.

- 219 The pattern is similar in many lessons: pupils are interested, concentrate well and show good levels of motivation. Teachers' high expectations and class management skills encourage this. They know their pupils very well and they have very good relationships with them that are friendly and encouraging. Homework is used very effectively to ensure that pupils produce high quality work for each of the assignments that are integral to the course. In leisure and tourism, while the teaching is satisfactory, the tasks chosen by teachers are not as interesting and pupils do not find them as motivating. Generally, however, the quality of the teaching and the good levels of attainment lead to large numbers of pupils choosing to follow vocationally orientated courses in the sixth form.
- 220 Each of the courses makes a very good contribution to the development of the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communications technology. In particular, pupils are encouraged to use computers to present their work and their skills in doing so are very good. This results in interesting and colourfully laid out text that is well illustrated with appropriate pictures or graphs.

### ***The programme in the sixth form***

- 221 Attainment in economics and business at GCE A-level is very good because teaching is good and often very good. The 2000 examination was the first year the school had entered students. As yet the national results for 2000 have not been published but the school's results were above the national average for 1999. Students' work is at least in line with the course requirements and indicates good standards.
- 222 Teaching is very well planned and appropriately academic but also stimulating. Teachers have high expectations of their students who are treated as mature and independent. They are encouraged to debate and argue and are able to do so.
- 223 This results in very good learning from highly motivated students who in turn place high demands on their teachers. Relationships between students and teachers are very good. Teachers are friendly, have a good knowledge of students' attainment and monitor and encourage their progress very well.
- 224 Good teaching again leads to good attainment for students studying for the Advanced GNVQ in business. Those students entered for the award in 2000 did very well. All attained a pass with distinction or merit. Teachers have a good knowledge of the requirements of the course and plan their lesson to ensure that these are met in interesting ways. For example, when students were studying sales techniques the teacher invited a salesman into school to give students the benefit of his first-hand experience. The quality of students' work meets the requirements of the course. The attainment of students in Year 12 is very good. In Year 13, despite the best efforts of the teacher, students are not as well motivated to work and their attainment

is only satisfactory. The teacher has very good knowledge of each student's progress, relates to each of them in a friendly way and provides them with a great deal of encouragement. This has worked very well in terms of motivating and ensuring high standards from Year 12 students.

- 225 There is also much good and very good teaching in health and social care and this again leads to high standards. In 2000, students followed a course leading to the intermediate award for the GNVQ. This is equivalent to two passes at GCSE. The results were very good with all of the students attaining passes and half of them with distinction and a third of them with merit. Several of these students have chosen to continue their studies for the Advanced GNVQ. The work seen indicates that standards are high and at least in line with the requirements of the course. Teachers have a good understanding of these requirements. They ensure that these are met in lively and practical ways and this creates good motivation in their students. In particular they know their students very well and they relate to them in such a way that they feel valued and encouraged.
- 226 Students clearly enjoy their work in these vocational subjects and many of them have applied to university to continue their studies in these areas.