

INSPECTION REPORT

NINESTILES SECONDARY SCHOOL

Acocks Green, Birmingham

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103558

Headteacher: Mr Dexter Hutt

Reporting inspector: Mr Michael Newton
2494

Dates of inspection: 25th - 29th September 2000

Inspection number: 224013

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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
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Peter Bennett
Date of previous inspection:	May 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
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K. Watson 31831	<i>Team inspector</i>	Design and technology.	
S. Richardson 30282	<i>Team inspector</i>	Modern foreign languages; Equal opportunities.	
J. Challands 22042	<i>Team inspector</i>	Physical education.	
D. Benstock 20243	<i>Team Inspector</i>	Science.	
M. Merchant 27368	<i>Team inspector</i>	Geography.	Sixth form.
D. Wigley 1340	<i>Team inspector</i>	Music.	
A. Hill 18261	<i>Team inspector</i>	Special educational needs; English as an additional language.	Special learning centre.
R. Portsmouth 19528	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics.	
G. Preston 1990	<i>Team inspector</i>	Information technology; Business education.	
M. Sewell 27983	<i>Team inspector</i>	English.	
R. Whiteley 8744	<i>Team inspector</i>	Art.	
R. Wilkins 18673	<i>Team inspector</i>	Religious education.	
D. Wasp 10895	<i>Team Inspector</i>	History	Curriculum

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Ninestiles School is a large, mixed 11-18 Technology College of 1384 pupils. It is heavily oversubscribed and attracts pupils from a wide area and broad social background. Its immediate catchment area is mainly disadvantaged and this is reflected in the above average number of pupils entitled to free school meals (30 per cent). There is a special learning centre attached to the school with 41 pupils. These pupils all have statements of special educational need (SEN), and most have speech and learning disabilities. In addition, there are a further 17 pupils in the school with statements. The ability profile of pupils on entry has in the past been below national averages, but it has been improving so that this year, for the first time, Year 7 pupils have a broadly average profile. Nearly a third of pupils are from ethnic backgrounds, and nearly half of these come from homes where English is not the main language, although none of them need additional support.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Ninestiles is a very good school with a distinctive and exciting ethos. The headteacher is an excellent leader with a focus on improvement. He is ably supported by his deputies and senior management team. The school has already been recognised nationally as an improving school and it is nearing its aim of being a top ranking comprehensive school. It has a very positive, vibrant culture in which individuals are valued and everyone strives for the best. Pupils take an active part in their learning by setting targets and agreeing appropriate levels of learning. They flourish in a secure and supportive environment that blends together clear policies, high expectations and the creative use of new technologies. The strong, well led teams of subject teachers focus on improving teaching and learning, the quality of which is now outstanding. Standards of achievement are therefore improving all the time and at a faster rate than in other schools. Although the percentage of pupils achieving the higher grades in GCSE and A level examinations is still below the national average, pupils make very good progress. The school provides good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Raises standards of achievement by focusing on the quality of teaching and learning.
- Has excellent leadership at senior, faculty and pastoral levels.
- Teaching is very good overall. There is no unsatisfactory teaching.
- Fosters enthusiasm for learning by involving pupils in the setting of personal targets.
- Creates a caring community where relationships are excellent.
- Makes effective use of new technologies to enhance provision and learning.
- Has a clear discipline policy that is understood and consistently applied.
- Brings about improvement through innovative ideas that meet pupils' needs.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Achievement of higher grades at GCSE and at GCE Advanced Level.
- Some aspects of otherwise good teaching and learning; improving pace and the quality of homework in some lessons.
- The continuity, progression and coherence of personal and social education across the school.
- Further development of the tracking and assessment procedures of ICT across subjects.
- Making provision for the teaching of modern foreign languages for all in Key Stage 4, and for the teaching of religious education in the Sixth form in the context of wider curriculum development.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made significant improvements since the last inspection, particularly in raising standards and improving examination results. It has achieved this by being single-minded in its endeavours to raise the quality of teaching and learning, and in this it has been particularly successful. The appointment of Advanced Skills Teachers as managers in major faculty areas has helped this process. The school has worked hard to improve the levels of attendance, and, as a result of giving the issue a high profile and introducing a strong competitive element, has been successful in raising it to the national average. It has now set even higher targets for itself. Parents now feel more involved in their child's education, particularly as a result of the system whereby pupils negotiate targets and the classes in which they can best achieve them. Homework is regularly set, although there is room for improvement in its quality. The curriculum has been regularly reviewed and an appropriate amount of teaching time, in excess of recommendations, has been allocated at each key stage.

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
GCSE examinations	E	E	C	A
A-levels/AS-levels	n/a	E	E	

Key	
<i>well above average</i>	<i>A</i>
<i>above average</i>	<i>B</i>
<i>average</i>	<i>C</i>
<i>below average</i>	<i>D</i>
<i>well below average</i>	<i>E</i>

In 1998, the percentage of pupils achieving five A*-G grades in GCSE examinations rose above the national average for the first time, and has remained so ever since. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades has also been rising, but has not yet reached the national average. In 2000, there was a slight drop from 38 per cent in 1999 to an unconfirmed 35 per cent. The overall improvement in the school's results is significant. Based on average point scores per pupil, they are not only improving at a faster rate than the national trend, but are well above the average for schools with pupils of a similar background. In the work seen during inspection, pupils achieve well. Standards in many subjects continue to rise, and are now broadly in line with national averages in many areas. As at the time of the last inspection, there is no significant variation in the attainment of boys and girls or of pupils from ethnic backgrounds. Taking account of the prior attainment of many of the pupils in the sixth form, they are achieving well.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils show a real enthusiasm for school and are active participants in their learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. The discipline for learning policy is clear and respected. It is underpinned by the school's values, which are understood by all.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships are excellent. There is a noticeable absence of any oppressive behaviour. Pupils respect others and develop self-discipline.
Attendance	This has improved significantly since the last inspection and is now at an acceptable level. There is now only a small group of persistent non-attenders.

The school has established a very secure, positive environment, appreciated by pupils and parents alike. The excellent quality of relations at all levels has a significant effect on the standards achieved. The discipline policy is consistently applied to good effect. There is a very good balance of praise and reprimand. On those occasions when bullying does occur, it is dealt with quickly and positively, and several parents have expressed appreciation of this.

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 very good overall. It is good or better in 85 per cent of lessons and in half of these it is very good or excellent. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. Lessons of high quality were seen across all subjects. In English, half the lessons were very good and four out of ten good. In mathematics, the majority were good, with a few very good and a similar number satisfactory. In science, the teaching in most lessons was either good or very good. As with other subjects, the significant strength in the teaching is the way pupils are involved in their learning because they are given clear objectives and know the criteria by which to judge progress. There are no significant weaknesses in teaching. The needs of pupils of all abilities are well met. The teaching of literacy skills is good overall across subjects, but the focus on numeracy skills is not as strong.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Overall good. A serious effort is made to meet the needs of pupils. The sixth form curriculum needs further development.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good, both for those in the unit and those in the main school. They are well supported by specialist staff and teachers generally.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL)	This is not an issue in the school. All EAL pupils are competent in English and have full access to the curriculum.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Pupils develop well within the culture of the school. The programme for PSE is satisfactory but needs further development. Opportunities for social development are excellent, and for moral and cultural they are very good. Opportunities for spiritual development are satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very well. Procedures for caring and supporting pupils are excellent; including the monitoring of academic progress.

The school is very effective in its work with parents, and this is an improvement since the last inspection. Parents are regarded by the school as a key part of the school community. Parents are always involved early if problems of attendance, behaviour or academic progress arise.

The new Pupil Support Centre is designed to provide them with a more responsive service. This development illustrates the high level of care in the school. The curriculum is also well planned and seeks to meet pupils' needs; hence the number of vocational courses at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. However, the school makes no provision for all pupils to study a foreign language in Key Stage 4 or religious education in the sixth form.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent at all levels. The consistently high quality of leadership and teamwork is a real strength of the school, and is responsible for much of the improvement since the last inspection.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are very supportive, and are actively involved with staff on school development. Their committee structure works well.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Senior staff regularly review performance and monitor changes carefully. Excellent use is made of data at whole school level.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent. Financial support and planning are clearly focussed on educational outcomes.

The school manages its finances well to ensure that it is generously staffed. Teachers are well qualified and appropriately deployed. Overall, learning resources are good. The number of computers to students is very high and there is a satisfactory provision of texts. Accommodation is adequate and used well. Recent refurbishment and decorations have added to the quality of provision. As with every aspect of the school, changes are made and resources targeted with the clear purpose of raising standards. The headteacher has taken every opportunity to acquire funding from various sources in order to improve provision. All those in leadership have a responsibility for monitoring developments, and this brings about significant improvements. The principles of best value are an integral part of the management style of the school.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The school expects their children to work hard.• The school is well led and managed.• They feel comfortable about approaching the school.• The teaching is good.• The school is helping their children to become mature and responsible.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The right amount of work to do at home.• A closer working relationship with the school.• To be kept well informed about how their children are getting on.

The overwhelming majority of parents are very positive about all aspects of the school. They recognise and compliment the school on its improvements. A relatively small number of parents were less confident about the issues identified above. Inspectors are of the view that the quality of homework could be improved. On the other two matters, inspectors believe that the school is doing all it can to work with parents and to keep them informed, and is mostly successful in these areas.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. Standards of achievement in the school have been steadily improving over recent years. Overall, they remain below national standards at both Key Stage 3 and 4, but are closer to them than at the time of the last inspection. Evidence from inspection shows further improvements, and standards in many areas are judged to be broadly in line with national averages at both key stages. As at the time of the last inspection, there is no significant variation in the attainment of boys and girls or of pupils from ethnic backgrounds.

2. In 1998, the percentage of pupils achieving five A*-G grades in General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations rose above the national average for the first time, and has remained so ever since. Very few pupils, other than persistent non-attenders, fail to achieve at least one A*-G pass. The percentage of pupils gaining five or more A*-C grades has also been rising, but has not yet reached the national average. At the time of the last inspection, 18 per cent of pupils gained higher grades. In 1999, this had risen to 38 per cent. In 2000, there was a slight drop to an unconfirmed 35 per cent, but an abnormally high number failed to sit the examination. The overall improvements in the school's results are significant. When judged on the basis of the average total point score per pupil, they are not only improving at a faster rate than the national trend, but are well above the average for schools with pupils of a similar background. All the evidence points to pupils having made very good progress through the school.

3. This improvement has been achieved as a result of a clear focus on raising standards. There has been strong leadership, training and monitoring to improve teaching and learning. A culture has been established where teachers and pupils are partners in learning, and they strive together to achieve the best results possible.

4. As the image of the school has improved, it has attracted pupils from a wider academic and social background. This, coupled with improved standards in primary schools, has resulted in cohorts of pupils entering the school with an improved ability profile. For example, when the current year 11 entered the school, only a quarter had reading ages above their chronological age, but in the current Year 7, 58 per cent have reading ages above their natural age. This improved profile is also reflected in the results of standardised tests administered by the school prior to entry, and in National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 2. Overall, pupils now entering the school are achieving broadly in line with national averages for the first time. Each year group, however, has a different ability profile, with pupils of higher ability being less well represented as you move from Year 7 to Year 11.

5. Results in National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, although an improvement on the previous year, remained below the national average. Results in science were well below. As with GCSE, when looked at overall, using average point scores, the trend is upwards and at a faster rate than in schools nationally. Results in 1999 were close to the average for similar schools in English and science, but well below for mathematics. This year's results have improved further, particularly in mathematics. Although it is not yet possible to say how these results match national averages, there is reason to believe that the upward trend has been maintained.

6. The sixth form was established in 1997, and the first cohort sat GCE Advanced Level (A level) examinations and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) in 1999. Groups were small, which makes comparisons with national statistics unrealistic, but overall attainment was, as expected, below the national average. In the GNVQ courses offered to that cohort, pupils achieved a 61 per cent pass rate, which was also below the national average.

7. In English, results in national tests at Key Stage 3 and in the numbers attaining higher grades at GCSE at Key Stage 4 are still below the national average. However, inspection evidence indicates that the overall standards of pupils' work is above those of last year's pupils and is at the national average. There is significant improvement in the standards of work in English literature at Key Stage 4. Pupils' attainment in the sixth form is generally in line with national expectations.

8. In mathematics, attainment in 1999 was also below the national average at Key Stage 3. However, the results for 2000 show a significant improvement. Similar improvement is evident at GCSE between the 1999 and 2000 results at grades A*-C. From work seen during the inspection, pupils are now achieving broadly in line with national averages at both key stages.

9. In the 1999 Key Stage 3 tests in science, the average performance of pupils was well below the national average, but results improved this year to a level closer to national expectations. From work seen during inspection, the overall attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with expectations. Results at the end of Key Stage 4 in both 1999 and this year are still well below the national average. Observation of pupils' work in Key Stage 4 indicates that standards are below expectations, but reflect some improvement from previous years. Standards at A level in biology, chemistry and physics vary from year to year. In current groups, the expected grades are slightly higher in biology and chemistry than in physics.

10. Standards of achievement in other subjects follow a similar pattern to the core subjects, and relate to the improving levels of pupils' prior attainment. With the exception of art and physical education where achievement is high, the proportion of pupils achieving A*-C grades in GCSE is below subject averages nationally. However, the proportion achieving grades A*-G is above average, and standards are rising. At Key Stage 3, pupils are now achieving broadly in line with national expectations in all subjects except modern foreign languages. They are above expectations in information and communications technology, geography and art.

11. Teachers challenge pupils to achieve their best and pupils respond positively to these demands. They are actively involved in their learning and work with teachers to determine the most appropriate sets where they can benefit most from the work and realise their potential. As a result, levels of achievement and progress are good across the school. In the majority of subjects, pupils' achievements at Key Stage 3 are good in all subjects and very good in English, geography and art. The picture is more variable in Key Stage 4, with satisfactory achievement in mathematics and science, and very good achievement in English, art, design technology, music, physical education and religious education. In other subjects it is good.

12. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress overall at both Key Stages 3 and 4. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Their good progress is a result of the high quality of teaching, which takes their needs into account, along with the very good support from the learning support assistants. Progress is more rapid in modern languages, religious education and geography. Progress is good in all other subjects, apart from science at Key Stage 4, where progress remains satisfactory. Pupils whose first language is not English have no need of additional support. This is partly because they are competent learners in the English language and partly because the harmonious, multi-ethnic ethos of the school ensures that they are fully included and able to benefit from the very good quality of teaching. Similarly, gifted and talented pupils make good progress, except in science where more could be done to extend their learning. In art and music, particularly at Key Stage 4, pupils are able to develop their talents to the full.

13. The levels of literacy have generally been low for pupils entering the school, and this has been a focus for improvement through the literacy policy. Very good attention is paid to vocabulary, spelling and grammar in history, religious education and geography. In these subjects, there is much evidence of writing for a range of audiences using a variety of strategies. Pupils are generally aware of audience and appropriateness of style in their writing, but there is little evidence of redrafting of work. Technical vocabulary is well developed in design technology, physical education, music and art. In science, the use of technical language is improving, but specific literacy strategies need developing. Grammatical and spelling errors are corrected across all subject areas, and there is generally a good standard of accuracy and presentation. Pupils show confidence in oral work, listening attentively and allowing others to make contributions in discussions. Pupils use the Open Learning Centre regularly, and are able to read and comprehend, extract information and use referencing skills well. However the effect of silent reading in raising standards of literacy is inconsistent. The impact of this and other strategies needs further monitoring across all curricular areas to be even more effective.

14. Numeracy skills are satisfactory; with scope, therefore, for further improvement. There are departmental policies in place that identify the skills necessary in that subject. Number skills are regularly practised within mathematics lessons, and there is some evidence of progression of skills through both key stages. Data handling is very evident in almost all subjects particularly geography, history, physical education, design technology and science. Graphical work was seen in science and physical education at A-level, with pupils able to interpret information, draw and label axes using the correct scale, and plot points.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

15. Pupils' attitudes, values and behaviour are very good and a strength of the school. The majority say they enjoy coming to school, and this is also the view of their parents.

16. Pupils come to lessons with positive attitudes and a willingness to learn. They show interest in their work, sustain concentration and are willing to apply themselves to the tasks set. They ask and answer questions readily, join in discussions and contribute well during lessons. Most students are confident, good-humoured and relaxed. They are generally enthusiastic about lessons and keen to do well. In a Year 7 English lesson where pupils were improving writing skills, they were observed to put a lot of effort into writing clearly and neatly.

17. A major factor contributing to high standards and the positive attitude to learning in the school is the way pupils work with their teachers and tutors to set appropriate targets for themselves and engage meaningfully in decisions about their teaching sets (known in school as the 'levels' system). Parents speak of pupils being empowered and pupils themselves are knowledgeable about their capabilities. They are genuine partners in learning.

18. Pupils also collaborate well with each other when working in groups, as was witnessed in a Year 9 English lesson where pupils were being taught the skills needed to make an effective written presentation. Pupils were keen to settle to their work and share their ideas with the group. They are given many opportunities to take the initiative for their own learning, through project work, the use of information technology and in deciding the resources they need to complete their work. They successfully rise to these challenges.

19. Behaviour in and around the school is very good. Pupils move around in an orderly fashion at break and lunchtimes. They behave politely and are aware of each other, even in congested areas around lockers and corners. Bullying is rare in the school, and, when it does occur, incidents are quickly and effectively dealt with. The school operates a 'zero tolerance' policy towards any form of violence, racism and sexism including bullying. Pupils are aware of this and say that they feel secure and motivated to learn in the calm, ordered environment. Pupils are clear about the 'Discipline for Learning' system, with its stepped consequences for persistent or more serious behaviour. This policy was new at the time of the last inspection and is now a well established and an effective part of the culture of the school. Teachers apply the policy strictly and consistently. This is valued by pupils and parents.

20. Although fixed-term exclusions are above the national average, around half of these arose from incidents where this policy was strictly applied. Governors and parents are actively involved in re-admissions, and the fact that there was only one permanent exclusion last year indicates the effectiveness of the system.

21. The relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. Staff set an excellent example and show a high level of respect and commitment towards pupils. Their mutual respect allows pupils to develop socially, and they are not afraid to ask questions or discuss personal problems with their teachers. Teachers know their pupils well; year and class tutors use this knowledge to counsel pupils when there is concern. The very strong pastoral systems in place

ensure that problems of behaviour and attitude, whether social or academic, are usually identified and dealt with at any early stage.

22. Attendance has improved substantially since the last inspection so that it is no longer the issue it was. At that time, there was an attendance rate of 84.5 per cent, whereas last year it was around the national average of 91.2 per cent, with unauthorised absence below the national average. The school, however, is keen to improve this figure so it has set clear targets for improvement and has strategies in place to help achieve them. It is conscious of the fact that a hard core of non or irregular attenders still exists, some of whom warrant legal action being taken against their parents.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS TAUGHT?

23. Pupils benefit from some outstanding teaching throughout their time in the school. Its high quality contributes significantly to pupils' learning and the standards they achieve. They and their parents recognise how good the teaching is and the benefits in learning that derive from it. In four out of every ten lessons, the quality of teaching is very good and some is excellent. In a further four out of ten lessons, it is good. It is never less than satisfactory. This 85 per cent of teaching which is good or better is a significant improvement since the last inspection and considerably better than in most schools. It results from a consistent focus on monitoring the quality of teaching and on meeting the training needs identified. The strategy of appointing Advanced Skills Teachers as leaders of teaching teams has also made a valuable contribution to improvement. Very good lessons can to be seen in nearly all subjects and good teaching is evident in lessons across all subjects at both key stages.

24. Of all the good features seen in lessons, three characteristics stand out as making a significant contribution to pupils' learning. Firstly, lesson objectives are made clear to pupils, together with the criteria by which both pupils and teachers can assess progress. This ensures that expectations and motivation are high. Secondly, teachers know their subject and enthuse their students by the use of a wide range of strategies. This dynamic was seen to motivate pupils in many lessons, creating a positive ethos for learning. Thirdly, teachers plan their lessons carefully so that pupils are fully engaged in learning throughout the seventy-minute sessions. All these characteristics help relationships and classroom management.

25. In some satisfactory or good lessons, teaching and learning could be improved further by giving more attention to maintaining a good pace of learning. Overall, teachers plan their lessons well, but occasionally, particularly with lower ability groups, there are low points in lessons where pupils do not maintain a good pace of learning. Examples of this were seen in a few lessons in English, mathematics, science and geography.

26. The vast majority of parents are satisfied with the amount of work their child is given to do at home, and there is little evidence to the contrary. However, in some cases, such as in English and geography, the quality of homework could be improved so that there is better continuity in pupils' learning. There are good examples of the use of homework to enhance learning in mathematics, modern foreign languages, religious studies and art.

27. Teachers know the abilities of pupils very well and plan effectively so that their needs are met in the large majority of lessons. This is particularly true for pupils with special educational needs (SEN). Teachers are informed about pupils' specific needs through the high quality information that the SEN faculty prepares, and they plan accordingly. Where there is additional support for SEN pupils, the teacher and learning support assistants (LSAs) work well together to ensure that these pupils are not disadvantaged by their learning difficulties, and that they enjoy the same rate of progress as other pupils. There were examples, however, where LSAs were not used as effectively as they might have been.

28. Pupils of higher ability are generally suitably challenged in lessons and make good progress, though this level of work was lacking in some science lessons. Funding from the 'Excellence in Cities' initiative is being used successfully to help raise the expectations and achievement of gifted and talented pupils.

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

29. The school offers a broad and balanced curriculum that encourages high achievement and which is planned effectively to meet the various needs, aptitudes and interests of all its pupils. It demonstrates the school's commitment to equality of opportunity.

30. At Key Stage 3, a common curriculum is offered to all pupils, and this is structured very well. In the humanities faculty, for example, a modular approach is adopted in Years 7 and 8 to provide a very effective introduction to the subject specialisms of history, geography and religious education. A particular feature of the delivery of the curriculum at this stage is the setting and banding system. Pupils are encouraged to negotiate with their teachers about the National Curriculum levels at which they will work. This helps to inform the setting arrangements, and gives pupils a sense of ownership over the whole learning process. This well thought out and inclusive approach works to the advantage of all pupils.

31. At Key Stage 4, there is a strong core of subjects, including, in this Year 10, an intermediate GNVQ course in information and communication technology (ICT). As a result, there is a relatively restricted choice for pupils from two option blocks. However, within the English curriculum, there is the possibility for pupils to study GCSE media studies or drama. Also in addition to ICT, the school provides two GNVQ Part 1 courses, namely leisure and tourism and health and social care, that lead to a qualification with the equivalent value of two GCSEs. There is, however, no provision for modern foreign languages as a core subject at this key stage, and the school fails to meet statutory requirements in this respect.

32. The sixth form provision is developing, and reflects the needs of the current students. The vocational curriculum is broad, including four vocational areas at GNVQ intermediate level and three at advanced level. These courses build on the very good practice in vocational education at Key Stage 4, and provide progression for these pupils. However, the GCE Advanced Supplementary (AS) and A level provision are currently limited, and many groups

have small numbers of students. The aim is to create a broader academic provision as a more comprehensive intake enters the sixth form. At present too many students are only following courses in two subjects. Also, there is no discrete taught course in Religious Education as there should be.

33. The school has a very efficient management structure to oversee the curriculum as a whole, and carries out an annual review of its effectiveness. The governing body plays a very proactive role in curriculum matters, with the relevant committee meeting regularly to receive faculty reports. Most of the issues highlighted in the previous inspection report have been addressed, including the need for more curriculum time overall, with more time for mathematics and modern foreign languages at Key Stage 3.

34. The overall provision for pupils with special educational needs, including the Special Learning Centre, is very good. The SEN co-ordinator and his faculty staff work tirelessly to ensure that a broad and appropriately balanced curriculum is delivered to suit these pupils. They are well supported so that they have full access to the main curriculum and maximum integration into the school. Pupils attached to the Learning Centre are disapplied from National Curriculum modern foreign languages so that they can be given additional basic skills support in that time.

35. There is a comprehensive whole-school language and literacy policy, which is reflected in the documentation of all subject departments. This strategy is managed effectively by the deputy head and head of English faculty. Classroom observations indicate that literacy has been a focus for improvement and that the policy is effective. There are also departmental policies in place to address those numerical skills necessary in each subject area. However, provision for numeracy across the curriculum is not as evident as it should be, and is an issue that the mathematics faculty is beginning to address.

36. There is a very good and comprehensive programme of extra-curricular activities to support the mainstream curriculum, including a residential trip for all Year 7 pupils and a sixth form residential weekend at a university. There is a wealth of clubs and activities, including sports, music and drama provision. The multimedia club, in particular, provides a thoroughly worthwhile and enjoyable experience, with its focus on independent learning, collaborative work and research skills. A wide range of visits is undertaken to widen pupils' horizons in most subjects, including humanities, design technology, drama, music and science. The participation rates for sporting and other extra-curricular activities are high, and a curriculum enrichment programme is provided at the end of the summer term to broaden the outlook of all pupils.

37. The personal and social education (PSE) programme is currently under review. At present, it is delivered through English in Year 7, and as a separate subject in Years 8 and 9. At Key Stage 4, it is linked to religious education as part of a New Society and Ethics course. In the sixth form, it forms part of the enrichment programme. There is, therefore, a diversity of provision in this area of school life, and a need for close monitoring procedures to ensure continuity and progression.

38. There is good provision for work-related education. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, there is a clear focus on the preparation of pupils and students for the next stage of education or for the world of work. Pupils at Key Stage 4 receive regular careers advice, both from the school and from the local careers service. There is an industry day for Year 10 pupils supported by local businesses. A work experience co-ordinator plans an effective two-week work experience placement for all Year 11 pupils, with the opportunity for some of a placement in France. A school based professional media company also provides opportunities for pupils to widen their experience in this field. A strong programme of careers advice, work experience and mock interviews is provided for sixth form students, to support them in their choices beyond school. All these initiatives are evaluated and monitored effectively within school.

39. The school has very good links with the local community, which enhance pupils' academic and personal development. Many local companies support the school and pupils visit local firms and industries. In addition, there is a link between the humanities faculty and a local children's hospice, and between Year 12 students and a local special school. The sixth form enrichment programme also has a very strong emphasis on community links. Many of these arise as a result of the effective work of the school's business manager. The school premises are used extensively by the local community, and the school has strong connections with the adjacent leisure centre. Community links are very well promoted in most subjects; for example, in design and technology, information technology, religious education, modern foreign languages and music.

40. The school forms constructive relationships with partner institutions. There are increasing pastoral links with primary schools, and plans to develop stronger curriculum links. Support and training for local primary teachers is already in place. In terms of tertiary education, the school has initial teacher training connections with local universities and a group of trained mentors gives good support to students' training needs.

41. Overall, the school makes a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Provision for social development is excellent. The values of the school stress personal responsibility and respect for others and are practised through the active involvement of pupils in their learning, the discipline for learning policy and the quality of relationships with staff. This creates an environment in which pupils quickly mature into responsible young adults who take pride in their own achievements and the achievements of others. Wider social issues are addressed in assemblies and debated in tutor periods and PSE lessons.

42. Pupils' moral development is very effectively promoted in the school. The same values and policies that promote social development, coupled with the high standards set by all staff, also, provide a secure moral basis. Discrete periods of PSE are used to discuss moral issues and other subjects make effective contributions. For example, pupils in a Year 9 class discussed the unequal distribution of wealth and the problems of genetically modified foods.

43. Provision for cultural development is also very good. Pupils' are able to experience a whole range of cultural diversity through visits that form part of the taught and extended curriculum. For example, they learn about music, poetry, art and dance from various countries and eras. In religious studies, they visit churches, a Sikh Temple and the Central

Mosque. Pupils benefit from being in a multi-ethnic school where the cultures of others is respected and celebrated. Religious studies also makes a very good contribution to spiritual development and several good assemblies were seen where music was used to provide a calming, reflective atmosphere.

44. The provision for spiritual development is satisfactory, but less well developed than other aspects of personal development. There is a lack of awareness evident, in both schemes of work and classroom practice, of the potential for development within the taught curriculum. Daily assemblies for all pupils are regarded as an important part of the day. They are well organised and are worthwhile occasions where the values of the school are reinforced and achievements celebrated. In those observed, however, there was little opportunity for reflection and they did not constitute an act of worship.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

45. The school's care for pupils is very good. In every aspect of the school, it is evident that careful thought and planning have gone into ensuring that all the needs of pupils are being addressed. In terms of pupils' general well-being, a number of innovative procedures have been introduced, such as the notion of the continuous day, with the provision of good quality food for breakfast and lunch, in an attractive well managed environment. Another is the use of swipe cards for a range of purposes, together with the widespread use of closed circuit television to monitor the inside of the school. These features help to create a smooth-running, secure environment. This is recognised and appreciated by both parents and pupils.

46. One of the key strengths of the school is the way it teachers regularly assesses pupils' academic achievements against National Curriculum criteria and uses the information to set targets and form groups in which pupils are appropriately challenged. This is an excellent strategy and as a result, pupils become active participants in their learning, fully aware of the level of their work and how they can improve. Each department has an individual application of this assessment policy, which is consistently applied. National Curriculum levels are also embedded into each department's thinking and practice. The use of whole school assessment data by senior management in evaluating progress and determining school strategies for raising standards is excellent.

47. The school is also developing strategies to make use of the increasing amount of information about the performance of groups of pupils and individuals. Departments have a wealth of data available, derived from standardised tests and national testing, that indicate pupils' level of attainment and future performance potential. This data is now being regularly updated and made available through the school's computer network and the electronic notebooks that each teacher has. This is now being positively used to refine judgements about individual pupils' progress but not all teachers fully appreciate the potential of this information in judging subject or whole group progress and adjusting curriculum plans accordingly. Although the use of assessment data to inform curriculum planning is good and most departments do use their subject assessments to review schemes of work, there is the potential for further enhancement by better analysis of data at subject level.

48. Assessment of all pupils with special educational needs is very thorough and those teaching these pupils are given full details of their attainment by the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator. The Individual Action Plans for these pupils provide a very good basis for their learning.

49. Procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are excellent. Even in their first few weeks at the school, pupils understand the rewards and sanctions within the 'Discipline for Learning' system. Rules about behaviour in and out of the classroom are consistently and strictly applied and although initially pupils admit that they found the system harsh they soon come to appreciate its value in providing a secure framework in which they can benefit from school. Personal responsibility is regularly stressed and as much praise as possible is used to recognise pupils' personal or academic achievement. There is good support from within the school and from other agencies for those pupils with specific behavioural difficulties.

50. Procedures for child protection are very good and are consistently applied by all staff. Health and safety arrangements are effective. There is a clear, published policy, and risk assessments are carried out and recorded. A number of teachers and all staff in the Pupil Support Centre have received first aid training.

51. The pastoral care system is very effectively managed by a deputy headteacher through the heads of year and class tutors. It supports pupils very well in all aspects of their academic and personal development. It is itself supported by the newly created Pupil Support Centre, where individual pupils and their parents can seek help with day-to-day problems or guidance on any issue of concern.

52. This department also plays a major part in monitoring attendance. A member of the support team telephones parents on the first day of any unnotified absence, and detailed statistics and absence reports are prepared daily. Senior pastoral staff meet weekly to review the patterns of absence and decide what action is required. Pupils keep records of their own attendance in a student planner, which stresses the importance of regular attendance in their learning. Parents are made aware at a very early stage if attendance or timekeeping is causing concern. If necessary, the school will make a home visit or refer the matter to the educational social worker. The school gives awards for the best class attendance, and the attendance of each year group is well publicised. Through this excellent monitoring and promotion system, attendance is kept in the minds of pupils so that in every way possible the school maintains progress in this area.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

53. Parents are generally very pleased with the high standard of education and care received by their children. They particularly value the way the school expects their child to work hard, and they feel comfortable in approaching the school with problems or questions. The school is very effective in its work with parents. They are regarded by the head and staff as a key part of the school community. Parents find the twice yearly parents' meeting very informative, particularly in identifying the level that their child is working at and helping them to understand the targets for improvement. Parents are always involved early if

problems of attendance, behaviour or academic progress arise. They say that teachers know the pupils well, and they are pleased with the information they receive on induction, at Open evenings and through good quality end-of-year reports. There is an active Friends' Association, which organises social functions and raises funds for additional resources in the school. Recently, musical instruments, calculators and science equipment have been provided in this way. The Association is well supported by staff, and is valued as a means of bringing together the whole school community.

54. Parents' evenings are used as an opportunity to discuss whole school and individual problems such as attendance and behaviour. Parents' evenings and curriculum events are very well supported. The increasing popularity and reputation of Ninestiles School with parents can be judged by the attendance of over 1000 potential parents at the Open Evening held during the inspection. The student planner contains detailed information on homework and the curriculum pupils are to follow, and parents sign the relevant homework section on a regular basis. More detailed information about what is to be taught can be found in the forecast books issued each year to parents. Information, both formal and informal, for parents is very good. An excellent prospectus gives them a clear indication of the school's provision and aims. Regular newsletters are produced, and the governors' annual report to parents is of good quality. End-of-year reports are also good, clearly indicating the levels reached or those they are moving towards. Parents' evenings are valued as an opportunity to discuss their children's work formally.

55. Parents are welcome to come in to school to discuss their child's work or if they have concerns. Equally, the school will ask to see parents where pupils are giving cause for concern. The behaviour code and its consequences are a key part of the school's ethos, and parents were consulted through the home/school agreement about this. They say they are fully supportive of the school's efforts to ensure good behaviour. They say that discipline is good in the school, and value the information they receive. They are particularly impressed with the prospect of being able to access their child's homework via the Internet.

56. The partnership with parents has improved since the last inspection. Parents are now informed about levels of attainment in relation to national standards at Key Stage 3. In addition, the school has encouraged more parents to take a greater interest in their child's education. This has resulted in a very effective community of parents, pupils and teachers.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

57. The leadership and management of the school is excellent. The headteacher is an outstanding leader. He is dynamic, has a clear vision to establish an excellent school and has worked successfully in a measured and committed way to raise the quality of provision and standards of achievement over the past twelve years. The school is now well on its way to realising its aim of being a top ranking comprehensive school. With the three deputies, the headteacher ensures that the school retains a focus on its values and aims. The full senior management team represents a wide cross section of the school. It includes the bursar, business manager

and the pupil support centre manager, as well as key managers on the academic and pastoral side of the school. Together they ensure that the distinctive culture and on-going improvement of the school are maintained. There are clear strategies for bringing together the school improvement plan and for ensuring its successful implementation and review.

58. The positive ethos of the school is the key to its success. A culture of openness, self-evaluation and teamwork is evident at all levels, from staff, governors and pupils. Increasingly parents are becoming active participants in the life of the school, so that there is a strong sense of a community working together for the benefit of the pupils.

59. The quality of leadership and management at subject, pastoral, and administrative levels is excellent overall and has a positive effect upon standards and quality. For example, changes in mathematics, where a new head of department has begun to monitor teaching and is putting in place strategies to improve quality, is bringing about significant improvement in standards. Members of the senior management team and curriculum leaders provide good support to those for whom they have oversight. The regular and systematic monitoring of the quality of teaching and the implementation of policy is very good. The drive to improve ensures that new initiatives are regularly reviewed and adjustments made. For example, the strategy to involve pupils in discussing their level of working was monitored through some 200 lesson observations, and the resulting modifications to the strategy were incorporated in the next development plan.

60. The governors are highly committed to the school. They have an effective committee structure that enables them to work in partnership with the staff, provides them with a good level of awareness of the school's strengths and areas for development, and helps them monitor the school improvement plan. They share a clear understanding of the school's values and aims, and are fully involved with the wider staff in the school development planning process. They have a high degree of trust in the headteacher and senior staff, with whom they have a good working relationship. They discharge most of their statutory responsibilities, with the exception of fully implementing National Curriculum orders in respect of modern foreign languages at Key Stage 4, religious education in the sixth form, and by not providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

61. Financial planning is excellent and is clearly targeted on planned improvements. There is a creative and entrepreneurial approach to generating income and managing the budget, driven by a clear desire to make improvements for the benefit of pupils. This invariably stems from the headteacher's vision, but is shaped into a manageable strategy by senior managers. The post of bursar is new and a valuable addition to the senior management team. The school improvement plan itself addresses an appropriate range of issues. It shows no costings, but cost centres are set up to monitor spending. The school uses specific grants in a creative way to meet their intended purposes; for example, money from the 'Excellence in Cities' initiative is being used effectively to raise standards for gifted and talented pupils. Expenditure is carefully monitored and there is an awareness of emerging patterns. Currently the sixth form is not cost effective, but longer term projections indicate that within the next two years it will generate sufficient income to establish its viability. The governors' finance committee works very closely with the bursar and a retained responsible officer to ensure effective use of resources.

62. The school has so managed its finances to ensure that staffing is generous compared with similar schools. Teachers are suitably qualified to meet the needs of the curriculum. Professional development is well planned and linked to school and departmental priorities. Newly qualified teachers are well supported. The use of Advanced Skills Teachers to monitor and evaluate teaching is well established. There is a good allocation of support staff all of whom make a valuable contribution to furthering the aims of the school. Learning resources are good and effectively deployed. The school makes effective use of new technologies. The swipe card system for registration and purchases in the restaurant is particularly impressive and frees pupils from time-wasting activities. The use of CCTV helps maintain a secure environment. All teachers have electronic notebooks and administrative staff are competent users of ICT equipment. The Open Learning Centre is well managed and used. Provision of fiction and non-fiction books is not yet appropriate, but the multi-media resources are good.

63. The school has adequate accommodation to meet current curricular requirements. The quality of accommodation, however, varies from satisfactory to very good. Some rooms in the school are small for the size of classes and restrict the movement of pupils and staff. Internally the condition of the buildings is good, with many well presented areas, often enhanced by good displays of pupils' work and other items of information. The school has made strenuous efforts to produce a positive learning environment that is well maintained by the caretaking staff. In a number of cases, it has been possible to group together rooms to promote subject identities, with a helpful impact on teaching and learning. The site benefits from well organised security and monitoring measures, which limit vandalism and damage. However, the increasing demands made by the expansion of the school create a situation where the adequacy of the accommodation is a concern.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

64. The school has made significant improvements over recent years and set itself clear targets for the future. The school improvement plan provides a realistic programme by which the school can raise standards and quality further. The governors and senior staff should therefore continue to implement the plan, but also give particular attention to the following issues raised in the report:

- To continue to raise standards, and in particular to improve the percentage of higher grades at GCSE and at GCE Advanced Level by:
 - * monitoring teaching and learning to ensure that it is appropriate and of a high quality;
 - * carefully monitoring the quality of pupils' work to identify underachievement, and providing individual support where necessary;
 - * implementing and further developing the action plan T4/P2/1 & 2 of the School improvement Plan, in respect of raising attainment in the sixth form.*(Paragraphs: 2, 6, 7-10, 24, 28, 70)*
- To raise the quality of all teaching and learning to the level of the best in the school by:
 - * rigorously monitoring the pace of lessons and providing further staff training where needed;
 - * improving the quality of homework through a faculty review (as in P2/5 of the School Improvement Plan) and a revision of schemes of work to take account of best practice;
 - * establishing a regular quality assurance system for both these aspects of learning.*(Paragraphs: 25, 84, 97, 106, 128, 129, 133)*
- To improve the continuity, progression and coherence of personal and social education across the school by:
 - * revising the scheme of work so that continuity and progression are clearer;
 - * ensuring there is adequate staff training for the effective delivery of PSE;
 - * reviewing the appropriateness of the differing arrangements for delivery of the subject.*(Paragraph: 37)*
- To continue to improve the tracking and assessment of ICT across the curriculum by:
 - * enhancing the current School Improvement Plan (T3/P3/4) to ensure that all staff are trained to assess attainment and monitor progress in ICT in their subjects;
 - * ensuring that there is better co-ordination of ICT across the curriculum so that National Curriculum requirements are met in a balanced way at Key Stage 3;
 - * ensuring that end of key stage assessments for ICT are based on secure evidence from teachers from across the curriculum.

(Paragraphs: 151, 153)

- To make provision for the teaching of modern foreign languages for all in Key Stage 4, and for the teaching of religious education in the sixth form by:

(Paragraphs: 31,32, 60, 183)

65. The governors and senior managers should also consider what action to take to address the following matters in the report:

- Teachers use of assessment data to help assess the progress of cohorts of pupils against national benchmarks;

(Paragraphs:47, 108))

- The quality of provision for spiritual development;

(Paragraph: 44)

- Provision for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

(Paragraphs: 44, 60)

THE SPECIAL LEARNING CENTRE

66. The quality of teaching in the Special Learning Centre is generally very good. On occasions, it is excellent. The Learning Centre teachers are supported in their work by subject specialists from mainstream faculties. These cover the subject areas that the pupils, all of whom are statemented for special educational needs, are withdrawn from for a part of their curriculum time. Teaching focuses on basic literacy and numeracy skills, taught in the context of those subjects. Learning support assistants add a valuable support for the pupils. The speech and language therapist gives further support for two and a half days. She works with statemented pupils both in the mainstream and Special Learning Centre classes. Her assessment and monitoring skills are put to very good use in providing information that can effectively identify the literacy difficulties faced by pupils and track their progress.

67. Key Stage 3 pupils make good and sometimes very good progress in lessons. The skilled teaching and very good relationships between teachers and pupils ensure that pupils enjoy their work and concentrate through the lessons. The presentation of their work is good, and their handwriting is generally very neat. They cover a wide range of topics, learning about liquids, solids and gases and how they change their states; exploring the movement of the world's geographical plates; studying the work of great artists; improving their use of a modern foreign language and celebrating the world's key religions and cultures. Through all of these topic areas, they make very good progress in their speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. Their personal development, as seen in personal and social skills, improves under the firm, caring guidance of the teachers and support assistants. Year 7 pupils produce an attractive booklet and an accompanying video that is presented to Year 6 pupils on the school's induction day. In this project, they enjoy expert guidance from a local media company, using their photographic and video editing resources. This good progress continues through Key Stage 4 as pupils move into more and more mainstream lessons. Those pupils who still need support are given a reduced number of GCSE courses, so that they can benefit from the Learning Centre support as they prepare for their public examinations.

68. The head of the Special Learning Centre has a clear sense of direction, and works effectively with the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) to deliver a high quality of service to the pupils. A particular strength of the centre is its management of the inclusion process, whereby pupils' contact with the mainstream school is never lost, but is built up at an appropriate pace. This enables all of these pupils to be entered for public examinations and to gain results at least in line with their potential through sensitive support.

SIXTH FORM PROVISION

69. Provision for Post 16 education in this developing sixth form is good. The school has a clear vision of the type of sixth form it wishes to create, a vision that is being realised through the very efficient and effective head of sixth form and his team. The aim of developing a sixth form based on the quality of personal relationships, where students are nurtured in a caring yet challenging environment, is both commendable and is fully reflected in the schools' interactions with its pupils. For instance, pupils are fully consulted and help to shape emerging policies, such as the 'Self Discipline for Learning' programme.

70. Recent examination results indicate that standards are below the national average but are rising. The ability profile of each entry group is improving. This is as a result of both an improved ability profile and because of very good teaching and learning in the main school resulting in pupils achieving higher grades in GCSE. Currently pupils are achieving very well as a result of very good teaching; 46 per cent of teaching is very good or excellent. Standards are approaching national expectations in many subjects.

71. The school has a very well planned programme to deliver the key skills of ICT and number to all students. It is commendable that this provision is accessed by both GNVQ and A Level students. This not only reduces unit costs, but helps blur the divide between the academic and the vocational.

72. The curriculum is broadened by an imaginative enhancement programme. This involves not only work experience, but also uses the local and wider community to widen the experience of all students through, for instance, residential visits and voluntary work.

73. Procedures for monitoring the personal and academic development of students are very good. The team of tutors teaches a carefully planned tutorial programme and monitor progress through half-termly reviews. In this way, under-achievement is quickly identified and action taken to help students improve.

74. The small number of pupils in this developing sixth form means that, at present, the sixth form provision is not cost-effective. The school would benefit from marketing the distinctive nature of its Post 16 provision, both within the school and in the wider community, and extending the range of GCE AS/AL courses, to ensure that students are offered a broad curriculum.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	185
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	59

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4.87	36.76	42.70	15.67	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	1265	119
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	380	

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	58	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	206	2

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	189

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	41
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	103

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.07
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.98
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	139	96	235

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	66	53	53
	Girls	69	40	42
	Total	135	93	95
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	57(56)	40(33)	40[34]
	National	63(64)	62(59)	55(56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	15(19)	19 (12)	17(8)
	National	28(34)	38(36)	23(27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	63	63	59
	Girls	65	53	51
	Total	128	116	110
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	53(43)	49 (32)	47(67)
	National	64(62)	64(63)	60(62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	16(12)	20(12)	20(24)
	National	31(30)	37(37)	28(30)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	98	88	186

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	31	92	97
	Girls	39	81	86
	Total	70	173	183
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	38 (31)	93(91)	98(99)
	National	47.8(46.3)	88.4(87.5)	93.9 (93.4)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	35(29.6)
	National	37.8(37.0)

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	23	100
	National		N/A

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	2	17	19

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	9.0	9.0 (9.7)	0	0	0(0)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9(17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8(2.8)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0	N/A
	National		82.5

International Baccalaureate		Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied	School	N/A	N/A
	National		N/A

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	60
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	41
Indian	131
Pakistani	121
Bangladeshi	5
Chinese	6
White	941
Any other minority ethnic group	41

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	3	
Black – African heritage		
Black – other	2	
Indian	3	
Pakistani	8	
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	68	
Other minority ethnic groups	6	1

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)	91.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff:**Y7 – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	22
Total aggregate hours worked per week	630

Deployment of teachers:**Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	70.3
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 2	N/A
Key Stage 3	24.6
Key Stage 4	23.6

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	3863720.00
Total expenditure	3872764.00
Expenditure per pupil	2873.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	144463.00
Balance carried forward to next year	135419.00

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

1384

Number of questionnaires returned

334

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	51	42	5	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	51	42	2	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	44	47	6	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	34	49	12	2	2
The teaching is good.	53	43	1	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	43	41	9	3	4
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	60	36	2	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	74	24	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	43	42	11	1	3
The school is well led and managed.	68	28	2	0	2
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	54	38	4	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	46	41	5	2	7

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

ENGLISH

75. Standards of attainment on entry have been gradually rising, and were almost in line with the national average in 1999. This improvement is also reflected in the standards being attained at the end of Key Stage 3. Although results in National Curriculum tests in 1999 were still below the national average, they were above average in comparison with similar schools. Inspection evidence indicates that the overall standards of pupils currently at the end of Key Stage 3 are above those of last year's pupils. At the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' attainment in English language and literature is below the national average. However, the trend over the last three years is upwards, and inspection evidence suggests that this trend is being maintained. A higher standard of work, especially in English literature, indicates a significant improvement over that which was achieved last year.

76. There is no significant difference between the attainment of boys and girls at either Key Stage 3 or 4. At Key Stage 3, pupils with special educational needs are attaining standards that are consistent with their previous levels of attainment. At Key Stage 4, virtually all pupils attain very well, with most achieving grades in the A-G range at GCSE.

77. Pupils' attainment in the sixth form is generally in line with national expectations, though the groups are, at present, too small to make significant comparisons. However, the quality of work seen is above expectations and above that of many subjects.

78. By the end of Key Stage 3, standards in speaking and listening are satisfactory and frequently good. At Key Stage 4, they are generally good and those of high attaining pupils are excellent. Pupils listen well and confidently when taking part in group work and presentations, such as a Year 8 poetry lesson on 'Stealing' where the feelings of the poet were discussed in an animated and enthusiastic fashion. In a Year 10 lesson, a discussion of poetic devices helped pupils to understand significant features of a complex poem. Across the curriculum, pupils also show confidence in oral work and group work is lively and well focused. In discussions pupils are able to listen attentively and allow others to make contributions. A good example was seen in a year 9 group electing a school councillor.

79. Standards in reading are broadly in line with national standards. A strategy of silent reading at the beginning of Key Stage 3 lessons has helped improve reading skills. Most pupils at this stage read fluently, explore vocabulary, and refer to textual evidence to support a viewpoint. By Key Stage 4, pupils are reading with a good degree of sensitivity and understanding. The best example of this was a Year 11 lesson, where the reading skills were so advanced that a Year 11 group were able to interpret the key features in a challenging piece of text from Hemmingway's 'The End of Something'. The Open Learning Centre is used regularly by pupils in both key stages. The focus on reading helps pupils in other subjects. However, the effect of silent reading in raising standards of literacy is inconsistent and its impact needs further monitoring across all curriculum areas.

80. Writing skills are improving significantly across the school, and higher attaining pupils at Key Stage 4 write with confidence, clarity and lucidity, to produce folders containing a broad range of work of consistently high quality. A wide range of different strategies helps pupils improve. For example, a carefully constructed writing guide helped pupils in a lower ability Year 8 group to write about vampires. Pupils redraft to improve the quality of their work, and frequently refer to dictionaries or thesaurus. The presentation of coursework in Key Stage 4 is excellent, and shows a high level of commitment to the subject. There is much evidence of pupils of all abilities and at both key stages using technology both as a resource and as a tool for improving presentation. Pupils in the Learning Support area are supported by key words being displayed in the classroom. Some lower attaining pupils have difficulty with accuracy in writing, but they produce imaginative pieces, clearly demonstrating an understanding of audience and purpose in their writing.

81. In other subjects pupils are aware of audience and the appropriateness of style in their writing and there is generally a good standard of accuracy and presentation. Very good attention is paid to vocabulary, spelling and grammar in history, religious education and geography. In these subjects there is much evidence of writing for a range of audiences using a variety of strategies. Evidence of redrafting and the manipulation of texts is limited but was used effectively in English. There is a focus on technical vocabulary in mathematics, design technology, physical education, music and art. In science the use of technical language is improving but specific literacy strategies need developing.

82. Teaching overall is very good, and pupils make good progress as a result, including those with special educational needs. Some make very good progress particularly the gifted and talented and those in the sixth form.

83. All teachers display very good subject knowledge and high expectations of pupils. Planning is excellent. Teachers explain what they expect pupils to learn at the beginning of a lesson, and share with the pupils the criteria upon which they will be assessed. The tasks are appropriate for the levels of ability and are generally challenging. In the more successful lessons, pupils are drawn into taking an active part because tasks are well structured. Good use of questioning and feedback allows pupils to make very good gains in understanding, as in a Year 8 lesson on 'The Granny Project' where pupils developed an understanding of the problems of old age.

84. Good pace, high expectations of pupils, stimulating and well planned lessons and extended plenary sessions to consolidate learning are all features of lessons where progress is good or very good. There were many examples of such teaching. Progress was less assured where time was not managed as effectively and the lesson objectives were not kept in focus. Also homework is not always of a consistent standard and does not contribute as much as it could to learning.

85. Pupils attitudes are very good or excellent at all key stages. Behaviour in the classroom is also very good. All pupils display a capacity to work independently, moving from one activity to another with the minimum of fuss. Pupils respond in a positive and mature manner in group discussions, role-play activities or feeding back from group work. Pupils sustain concentration and have a business-like approach to their work. They co-operate with each other and teachers; warm relaxed relationships are a feature of lessons. Pupils very obviously enjoy the subject and appreciated the work of their teachers.

86. Overall, this is a thriving and energetic department with an assured commitment to making pupils equal partners in learning. Much has been done to address the issues in the last inspection report. Strategies were put in place to improve examination performance, and these have worked. There is a clear commitment to raising levels of attainment even further and to improving the range of teaching strategies to help achieve this. The excellent leadership and management, together with the high level of staff commitment, provide a firm basis for success. Recent additional resources of both books and technology have been well managed so that they have been quickly integrated into the work of the department. The most exciting of these is the white-board technology and power point presentations that have already had a positive impact on learning. This learning is also enriched by numerous extra-curricular activities and theatre visits.

Drama

87. Standards in drama are very good. Pupils confidently use a range of drama techniques effectively and understand the language of the subject very well. Pupils are able to explore ideas and create performances using choral speaking and freeze frames. They also use drama to explore themes such as biography, as seen in a Year 7 lesson. Pupils gain not only an understanding of the dramatic process through participation, but are also able to explore meaning and feelings. In a Year 10 lesson, for example, pupils explored how ideas and emotions could be expressed theatrically, thus deepening their understanding of Macbeth's frame of mind just before the murder.

88. Pupils make excellent progress in drama. In a Year 13 lesson, their drama skills were so well developed that the lesson flowed from one activity to another with little teacher intervention. The pupils were able to use mime and freeze frame to portray comic figures. They confidently used masks and 'props' to explore de-personalised movements.

89. The quality of teaching in drama is good or very good. Teachers have high expectations, which produce positive responses from the pupils and refreshingly lively pieces of work. Pupils were observed confidently managing and evaluating their own improvisations and making subtle changes to them. Teacher feedback to pupils is excellent, enabling pupils to gain confidence and develop further skills. The work of drama is enriched by frequent theatre visits and the work of visiting drama workshops.

Media Studies

90. Media studies is taught as an integral part of English throughout Key Stage 3. Pupils develop an understanding of all aspects of media texts, and become skilful at identifying features such as audience and purpose. A good example of this was a Year 9 lesson on 'Buddy', where pupils were composing a story-board from images produced from video stills.

91. At Key Stage 4, media is successfully offered as an option within English. Standards are in line with national expectations. Progress is very good, and pupils are well on course for achieving grades within the A-C range at GCSE. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils were able to talk with ease about icons and images in their work on World Cup Football. Pupils are articulate and confident with media terminology, and well used to multi-media presentations. The high standards in media are also having a positive effect on the main GCSE English course.

92. Standards at sixth form level are good, with pupils on course for achieving higher grades at A level GCE. In a Year 12 lesson, pupils discussed tabloid and broadsheet newspapers and the effect of Rupert Murdoch's press coverage.

93. The teaching of media is very good throughout all key stages. Clear lesson objectives are set, and the pace is brisk, with effective use of time. High expectations are a feature of teachers and pupils alike in media lessons. Resources are excellent, and information technology is used at every opportunity, which has a full and positive impact on learning.

MATHEMATICS

94. Attainment in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 is below the national average, although there was a significant improvement in the 2000 results compared with 1999. Pupils entered for GCSE examinations in mathematics in 1999 did worse than in most other subjects in the school. The percentage achieving higher grades remains below the national average, in spite of improvements in this year's results. There were no A level entries in 2000, and comparison of previous results with national figures is not valid because of the very small number of pupils who took the examination. From work seen during the inspection, the improvement in standards evident in recent years is likely to be continued in the future. School data shows that there is a rise in the ability of pupils on intake, so that a more normal distribution of mathematical attainment is now evident across Key Stage 3

95. Higher attaining pupils in Year 7 were seen confidently working at a level of work that exceeds the national expectations for pupils at this age. Lower attaining pupils in Year 7 could represent 3-dimensional solids on paper with accuracy. This, coupled with sustained reinforcement of their basic numeracy skills, is close to the national expectations for pupils at this age. Higher attaining pupils in Year 9 were seen work confidently with trigonometry involved in right-angled triangles, which is consistent with expectations for pupils at the higher levels of the National Curriculum. Pupils in Year 11 were working from topics from the higher-level GCSE examination with confidence, and showed good motivation to succeed. Confidence in trigonometry and algebra were evident in pupils' work. The very highest attaining pupils are being entered for GCSE early and achieve very good results. There is planned provision for them to study statistics to complement their mathematics studies.

96. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are very positive. They arrive at lessons promptly and settle to work quickly; many are reluctant to leave at the end of lessons. Good levels of concentration throughout each lesson accompany this positive attitude, enabling pupils of all abilities to make good progress. Both high and low attaining pupils achieve the realistic but challenging goals set for them at the start of the lesson by a combination of good teaching, their personal application and hard work. Pupils with special educational needs also make good progress towards their own targets. Good relationships exist between pupils and their peers and their teachers. This enables pupils to ask for support during a lesson without embarrassment. Pupils are mutually supportive when working through problems. They can explain their work to other pupils with confidence and are willing to present solutions to problems to the whole class. This atmosphere permeates all lessons; it complements the strong work ethos in mathematics and has made a positive impact on raising standards.

97. Teaching was good or better in almost all lessons and no unsatisfactory lessons were seen. The very best lessons captivated pupils' imagination, stimulated their interest and had high but achievable aims. Success was shared and celebrated by the pupils and the teacher. Most teachers had good subject knowledge, and this enabled them to plan lessons to contain suitable and relevant material. Some teachers of mathematics are non-specialists, but their own enthusiasm and the support of the head of faculty ensure that pupils make good progress. Teachers' presentation of lessons is enhanced by the use of personal computers, video projectors and, in some cases, an interactive whiteboard. This quality of presentation was reflected in the neatness of pupils' exercise books. For pupils with special educational needs, teachers plan class work that is at an appropriate level and clearly explained, and well-informed learning support assistants help these pupils as they work. Homework has a positive impact on raising standards by helping pupils to consolidate their knowledge. Marking is efficient in giving support and guidelines for further improvement. Assessment of pupils is well developed and the analysis of assessed work is used to inform curriculum planning, future teaching and target setting. A minority of lessons lacked the sustained pace and quantity of work required to fully engage pupils for the entire lesson.

98. Since the last inspection, the setting structure has been changed so that pupils are now set by ability, which helps meet their differing needs. This has been a motivating influence for pupils and teachers, and significantly contributes to the rise in results at both Key Stage 3 and GCSE. There has been good development of investigation tasks as required by the National Curriculum, and these are now integrated into an effective scheme of work. Provision for ICT has improved since the last inspection. A new head of faculty has been appointed who is an experienced teacher and an effective manager. There is now a strong, very hard working, unified department with much strength.

SCIENCE

99. Since the last inspection, standards at Key Stage 3 have risen, due to the impact of good teaching and the improved pupil profile on entry, which is now close to the national average. However, standards at Key Stage 4 remain below average at the moment, and below the level recorded at the time of the previous inspection.

100. Attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 is, overall, in line with expectations. In the 1999 tests, the average performance of pupils was well below the national average. Similarly, the proportion of pupils gaining level 5 or above was significantly below that found nationally, though the results were close to the average of schools with pupils from a similar background. In 2000, the national test results improved to a level closer to national expectations. Over the past three years, the overall attainment at Key Stage 3 has steadily improved. Observation of pupils' work in Key Stage 3 reflects this picture of attainment. For example, a majority of pupils in Year 9 have an understanding of the principles of reliability in measurements. They record observations systematically and draw simple conclusions. A significant proportion are working at a higher level with greater precision in experimental work, using their knowledge to predict and explain the results.

101. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is well below the national average. In 1999, the percentage of pupils gaining grades A*-C at GCSE in double award combined science, was well below the national average, though it was above that found in similar schools. The overall performance in 2000 was at a similar level to that of the previous year. Observation of pupils' work in Key Stage 4 indicates that standards are below expectations, but there has been some improvement on previous years. For example, most pupils know the basic principles of electricity, but few are able to clearly describe changes in voltage and current in different types of circuit.

102. Pupils with special educational needs make progress in both key stages in line with other pupils as a result of the individual support they receive. Higher ability pupils are being identified and are reaching a good standard, although for many their potential remains insufficiently fulfilled. The performances of boys and girls in national tests and examinations have varied over the last two years, but there is no significant difference in their achievements overall.

103. Standards at A level in biology, chemistry and physics vary from year to year, depending on the particular cohort of students. In 1999, low pass grades were obtained in biology and chemistry, but there was an improved profile in 2000. In the current Years 12 and 13, the expected grades show a significant improvement and are in line with national expectations in biology and chemistry, and somewhat below in physics.

104. Attitudes to work in science are very good. The pupils at all stages of the school are committed and show great determination to succeed. They collaborate extremely well in practical work, sharing ideas and resources with exceptional maturity. Pupils are willing and eager to participate in class discussion. Behaviour is very good, with respect for teachers being most noticeable. Due regard is given to health and safety instructions, and to the effect of actions on others in the class.

105. Teaching is good overall. Well over half the lessons seen were good or very good in quality, and the remainder were at least satisfactory. In Key Stage 3, the proportion of good teaching is higher than elsewhere and affects the standards achieved. All teachers have secure subject knowledge, and convey this to pupils through, for example, effective questioning techniques. The quality of marking is good, with a strong emphasis on the use of scientific vocabulary. Expectations promoted are high, both in terms of examination results and the understanding of concepts, which leads to the high motivation exhibited by pupils. Lessons

are managed efficiently, with good use of resources and an insistence on good behaviour. Requirements for safety precautions are clearly reinforced. Good use is made of regular assessments to identify under-achievement and to help pupils set targets for improvement of their learning. Team teaching is used effectively to enhance the learning opportunities and ethos for some weaker, foundation groups.

106. Planning is satisfactory overall, although not enough attention is paid to matching tasks to the attainment of both lower and higher ability pupils. The pace of learning varies; sometimes it is too slow while at others the opportunity is missed to give more detailed, extended tasks. New technology is used effectively by teachers in presenting visual display to pupils. However, pupils themselves do not make enough use of computers in learning in science and this limits progress.

107. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and achieve the targets set, since either specialist support is provided or group sizes are small enough for individual teacher intervention. Some pupils, mainly those with statements, are withdrawn to study a modified science curriculum. Gifted pupils are identified, but are not yet making maximum progress, although some provision is made for extension work in extra-curricular classes.

108. The leadership and management of the faculty are effective, even though the acting head of faculty is new to the position. However, the monitoring of teacher performance is not sharply focussed enough to identify strengths and targets for development. Also, although test and examination results are carefully monitored and reviewed, more detailed analysis is not evident of the value added to pupils' attainment, against national comparisons.

ART

109. At Key Stage 3, all pupils are able to address the targets of the National Curriculum with skill and confidence. They use their sketchbooks and note pads well to trace the development of their ideas and final compositions. Their drawing is accurate. They control colour boldly and delicately, and use the styles of established artists with understanding and confidence. They are able to create movement and balance in all their work, both 2D and 3D, in line with requirements.

110. At Key Stage 4, pupils of all abilities are confident in the use of colour, shading and control of graphic skills. There are clear indications of how the work of established artists and designers has influenced their own compositions. Their 3D work is innovative, and there is a good control of multi-media work, development of patterns, figure drawing, still-life and composition based on natural forms. Pupils are able to talk about their work fluently, making effective use of the language of art.

111. In GCSE examinations there has been a consistent rising trend since the last inspection. In 1999, over three-quarters of those entered achieved grades in the A*-C range, with boys and girls achieving equally well. This is well above the national average. Overall performance in art is well above the attainment of pupils in other subjects.

112. At Post 16, there is a wide range of work, the majority of it executed with care and skill. There is good control of graphic design, multi-media presentations, photo-collage, 3D work and animation sequences. Pupils' skills in drawing and painting are well represented in

figure work, observational still-life and landscape. There are some well-written and illustrated critical studies on work of established artists, which demonstrate depth of understanding of their period, style, influence and background.

113. Results at A level over the last two years have shown a gradual improvement, though it is misleading to compare the results to the national figures because the groups are very small so. Boys and girls achieved at the same level.

114. From scrutiny of work and lesson observations at both key stages and Post 16, standards are good in relation to national expectations. The majority of pupils are achieving the national standard, with a significant minority achieving above it.

115. Teaching is consistently good and often very good, promoting high educational standards. This has a beneficial impact on pupils' learning at all key stages, and encourages the positive and enthusiastic response of pupils that was on display in the lessons observed.

116. Teachers are enthusiastic and have a pleasant manner with pupils, which ensures their concentration. Sensitive and inclusive questioning motivates pupils to be eager to answer and feel that their views will be respected. Teachers are aware of pupils with special educational needs, and give them sensitive, individual attention, encouraging and supporting them to achieve to the best of their abilities. Teachers have high expectations of pupils, and are always positive when assessing their work. This sets a good example to classes and is reflected in pupils' constructive criticism of their own creations and those of others. Demonstrations from teachers and clear explanations of tasks to be undertaken are always accessible to pupils and motivate them to do well. In this area, one teacher's expert demonstration of texture and shading during a lesson on a still-life in Picasso's style, was much appreciated by the pupils, whose work was enhanced by the experience. In another lesson, a well prepared video of the work of various artists, their styles and historical context was followed by a quick-fire fun quiz. The pupils' success in answering the questions justified this particular teaching strategy as a valuable tool for developing understanding of the subject matter in an entertaining and constructive manner. All the teaching is designed to build pupils' confidence, extend their skills, increase their art vocabulary and develop creative responses to the projects being undertaken. Homework is used positively to reinforce and extend the work in class.

117. The department is very well led and managed. It has addressed the issue raised at the last inspection and introduced 3D work at all key stages. However, there is no clay work being undertaken and the kilns remain idle. Overall, the curriculum and schemes of work are well planned and designed to meet requirements. Assessment and recording is ongoing, and the information is meticulously used to set targets and further areas of investigation for all pupils. These assessments provide an instantly accessible profile of pupil progress through the key stages. The head of department conducts staff workshops, which are a useful source of in-service training and help to raise awareness of approaches, materials and styles of lessons. Resources are favourable, but the funds allocated are fully expended on consumables, leaving little with which to build up and renew equipment.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

118. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils achieve levels of work appropriate to their age and ability and some beyond. All pupils are engaged in a variety of project work, based on activities that include resistant materials, control, electronics, food and textiles. Pupils demonstrate an understanding of designing and making, and are able to carry out a range of tasks. Areas of experience are initially identified by teachers, but opportunities are discussed and negotiated in project work that enable pupils to develop research skills and extend their own ideas, both individually and in group situations. Pupils are able to gather information from a variety of sources. With guidance, and sometimes independently, they analyse that information and produce relevant, accurate ideas and specifications for their project studies. Regular homework contributes to pupils' understanding of their work. Communication skills are developing, and pupils have opportunities for some oral work, as well as extended writing that is generally well presented and accurate. Pupils make use of technical terminology, and useful displays of information and key words within all areas of the faculty help support this development.

119. The quality of designing skills and graphical work in resistant materials is not of a consistently high standard. Sketches and drawings have both annotation and colour and are informative, but they are lacking in organisation and structure. Pupils' range of ideas within their development work is limited, and lacks detail of construction and methods of making. There is in some cases an over-reliance on teacher support in these areas. In the compliant material area, folio work is of a consistently high standard. The use of ICT applications is well integrated into pupils' tasks, and ICT skills in technology are developed purposefully. Pupils use tools and equipment confidently and safely, and are able to explain their use and organise their working appropriately and productively. The basic skills involved in marking out, measuring and modelling are mostly well executed, and pupils are aware of the need for accuracy in their work. Cutting, shaping and simple assembly work is generally successful, and pupils produce work with some quality features. There is much valid emphasis on safe and correct working, and sensible consideration of health and safety factors.

120. Pupils show enthusiasm in evaluating their finished products against their early designed intentions. They are given much encouragement to assess and to be reflective about their work, and to make suggestions for development or improvement. Pupils throughout the faculty work very co-operatively, both individually and collectively in small groups. Pupils undertake a variety of learning activities. In compliant materials, there was evidence of good work, with pupils making oral presentations as part of a research and evaluation task, and problem solving within experimental work.

121. In Key Stage 4, GCSE results this year were lower in some areas than in previous years. However, standards in food studies remains above average in the best examples of work seen. Good progress is evident in textiles, graphics and electronics. Pupils have a solid understanding of the design process, and apply it successfully to their project tasks, generating a range of design ideas supported by relevant and thoughtful research, analysis and investigation. Pupils discuss their design ideas, producing valid conclusions about the relevance of their work. In many instances, pupils produce detailed specifications to support their project work. The effective use of ICT applications is evident in pupils' work. Their work displays a balance between designing and making and there is much evidence of good subject knowledge. Pupils make accurate use of technical terminology in discussions about their work. Design work is well presented. There is useful annotation and sensitive use of colour. Written work is mostly correct, although some pupils experience difficulty with

spelling and grammar. Final products have quality, function efficiently and are reflective of initial design development work. Pupils are enthusiastic and willing to experiment with ideas and to persevere with problem-solving tasks. They make good use of previous knowledge when addressing new tasks. They demonstrate safe working and show respect for the facilities and equipment.

122. In all courses in the sixth form, standards of achievement are satisfactory. Most pupils show confidence when discussing and explaining their work, and make useful progress in understanding issues relating to their area of study. Pupils have a developing awareness and understanding of the theoretical and practical elements of the subject area. They make appropriate use of a number of ICT applications to support their studies. Pupils' assignment work shows positive developments, with a thorough approach to planning, generation of ideas and relevant investigative study. Their work is generally well presented, report writing is organised, mostly accurate in content and supported by a sensible use of graphical material and commercial information. Pupils make sound attempts at sketching and in using formal drawing techniques. There is a positive enthusiasm for the development of personal designing and making skills. Pupils interact purposefully in small group situations, where effective problem solving and focussed independent working is evident within their activities.

123. The standard and quality of teaching across all key stages and in the sixth form is good, and some is very good. Staff demonstrate comprehensive subject expertise and experience over a wide range of specialisms. Teachers have a detailed knowledge of their subject and the content of lessons is technically correct. Staff project a keen interest in developing the skills related to designing and making. The presentation of teaching material is logical, precise and well structured, with clearly defined requirements and well organised assessment. The level of work is suitably matched to pupils' ability. Teachers employ a variety of strategies for lesson delivery, have helpful resources available, and make good reference to everyday situations to link up with the technological concepts being taught. Pupils' work is regularly marked, with helpful comment about achievements and how to improve work. In a minority of lessons the demands placed on pupils is limited and the pace slows.

124. Relationships in classes are good. There is a firm but friendly and supportive attitude towards pupils. This results in good teacher-pupil co-operation and a positive atmosphere in the subject areas. Well considered demands are made of pupils. They are given opportunities to investigate and experiment within their work and encouraged to persevere. Lessons have a clear focus, which helps pupils to stay on task. Pupils with special educational needs are well integrated and participate in the full course of activities. They are given appropriate work and good in-class support.

125. Staff have established close working links with industry, and these provide useful opportunities for pupils. There is well supported extra-curricular provision. The leadership and management of the faculty is very good. Progress since the last inspection has been good.

GEOGRAPHY

126. This is an effective and rapidly improving subject. Attainment since the last inspection has improved significantly. Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3, based on teacher assessments, is below national averages. However, direct observation of pupils' work indicates that the department under-estimates pupil attainment, and that standards are above expectation. GCSE results are below average when compared to similar schools, but they are improving rapidly. In the last three years, however, pupils performed less well in geography than in most of their other subjects. Standards of work seen in Year 11 lessons suggest that improvement is continuing, and that the achievement of all pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 is in line with expectations. Standards achieved by students in the sixth form are below the average of similar schools. Achievement of the current Year 13 is close to that expected nationally, even though their prior attainment was modest.

127. Pupils' progress is very good in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Most have a good knowledge and understanding of geographic processes and patterns, and of environment themes. For instance, pupils in a Year 7 class are already using appropriate geographic terms and have a good understanding of concepts such as 'fair trade'. In Year 11, the vast majority of pupils are able to interpret geographic information and make reasoned judgements. Pupils with special education needs and higher attaining students make equally good progress as a result of a skilful match of classroom tasks to the needs of individuals. This was well shown in a Year 9 lower attaining set, where excellent progress was made as a result of the teacher's use of models and demonstrations that enabled students to appreciate the abstract concepts of plate tectonics.

128. In all lessons, excellent relationships and behaviour, fostered by enthusiastic and stimulating teaching, contribute strongly to the positive attitude to learning. The majority of pupils respond well. They are eager, enthusiastic learners who readily engage in productive group and paired work, helping each other to search for information and solve problems. On occasions, where teacher exposition is over-long, a significant minority of pupils who have a low listening span, lose interest. They are sometimes too ready to spend time on low level tasks, instead of moving onto more challenging activities such as interpreting information and developing explanations.

129. Teaching overall is good. There is no unsatisfactory teaching, and one in five lessons is very good or excellent. Teaching is slightly better at Key Stage 3 than at Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. In all lessons, the very good subject knowledge of teachers is very skilfully transmitted through their lively explanations. These are invariably clear, stimulating and authoritative, drawing on many topical examples to illustrate and bring geographic themes to life. In a minority of lessons, however, progress is slowed by over-long teacher talk that results in pupils becoming passive. Very good use is made of audio visual aids, such as video and photographs, to reinforce pupils' understanding.

130. Learning is accelerated in all lessons by the very skilful management of pupils through high expectations of behaviour. Teachers create a relaxed yet productive atmosphere in classes, which is highly conducive to learning. Teachers expect much and encourage pupils to persevere when faced with difficulty. As a result, pupils readily engage in classroom activities, working with diligence and enthusiasm. Higher attaining pupils in particular are

now beginning to attain a much deeper understanding of complex geographic issues, such as the environmental conflict arising from urban development, and are achieving the standards of which they are capable.

131. Questioning is used effectively to challenge and develop students' understanding, although in a minority of lessons it is insufficiently probing and poorly directed, with the result that a small number of pupils sometimes dominate the lesson. Group work, role-play and simulations are very well used in enabling students to challenge and support each other in their learning. This was well demonstrated in a Year 10 lesson on urban regeneration, where pupils researched and presented a detailed analysis of conflict in docklands. Attainment would be enhanced if these activities were complemented by a greater use of information and computer technology in all lessons. In a minority of lessons, progress is impeded by an over reliance on textbook exercises.

132. In all lessons, very good levels of concentration and interest are well fostered by a brisk and purposeful pace. Time is used to the full, with teachers fully engaging pupils, resulting in their maintaining interest and becoming active learners. Progress in most lessons is accelerated by the teachers' careful planning. Activities are designed so as to encourage pupils to 'find out' rather than being 'told'. The confidence of teachers not to over-direct students in this way is rewarded by pupils' sense of achievement at their discovery of knowledge. This approach is not completely uniform across the department, however, and in a minority of lessons, too much time is spent on low level tasks, such as drawing graphs and copying notes, which prevents pupils from working at full stretch.

133. Homework, although regularly set, does not always support pupils' interest and understanding of their work. Too few tasks are set that encourage the development of research skills, particularly the use of computers to search for and present information. Nearly all pupils are keen to succeed, and most understand how well they are achieving. Work is regularly and accurately marked, with many helpful and supportive comments that encourage pupils to learn from their mistakes and move on.

134. The subject is very well led and managed by an efficient and effective head of department working closely with a dynamic head of faculty who has created a shared commitment to raise standards. The department identifies clear, quantified targets for improvements and devises strategies to reach them. The shared vision of the department and the faculty fully matches that of the school. The head of department's practice of carefully monitoring the work of the department through lesson observation and scrutiny of students' work makes a significant contribution to the improving standards in the subject. has been very good. Attainment has improved significantly since the last inspection and the department has done much to build on teaching skills and extend the achievement of all students.

HISTORY

135. In lessons and in work seen during the inspection, attainment at Key Stage 3 is now in line with national norms, except in lower ability groups where low levels of literacy are hampering standards. From the outset, pupils are encouraged to develop subject skills to the full, and quickly become familiar with the critical use of source material and historical terminology. At this stage, there is a strong emphasis on literacy skills. In particular, the development of writing skills is given considerable prominence, and some very impressive extended writing was seen in the work of Year 8 pupils. By the end of the key stage, most pupils demonstrate an impressive knowledge and understanding of historical techniques, and can organise information to produce structured arguments both orally and in writing.

136. As a result of these rapid advances, pupils studying the subject at Key Stage 4 are able to develop their subject skills to greater depth. Attainment levels in lessons are overall in line with national expectations at this key stage. At GCSE, results in the A*-C range have been below national averages in recent years, but they have been above national norms in the A*-G range for most of that period. GCSE results in history over time have not been significantly different from those in other subjects at the school.

137. No candidates have taken the A level examination as yet, but there is now a small group in both years of the sixth form. Students in these groups are performing well, and are honing their historical skills to produce work of depth and maturity. This was demonstrated in an excellent Year 13 lesson, during which students used three-dimensional models to create a totalitarian structure and then applied this to various interpretations of the Nazi regime in Germany.

138. The quality of teaching in the subject is never less than good. In over half the lessons it is very good or excellent. A key component of this is the emphasis placed on meticulous lesson planning and organisation. Aims and objectives are stated in detail at the outset of each lesson, and pupils are encouraged to reflect on their progress at the end. In addition, pupils negotiate with teachers the levels at which they will be working, and they are given a clear indication of how to improve their performance. In this way, the learning process is embedded in the minds of pupils and they feel a sense of ownership in that process. Teachers have very sound and secure subject knowledge, and use this to instil confidence in their pupils that they too can become competent historians. Praise and encouragement are used well to build up a strong rapport in the classroom, and there is an admirable sense of purpose, rigour and enjoyment in history lessons.

139. Teachers use a wide variety of techniques to enhance pupils' learning. This was seen to very good effect in a Year 11 lesson, during which pupils worked in small groups using a variety of resources. These groups were rotated regularly in order to widen the experience of pupils investigating the customs and beliefs of the Plains Indians. In all lessons, pupils are encouraged to work collaboratively and to develop their historical skills through group work and research. Extension work is provided for higher attaining pupils and, in this context, some excellent research work was seen from Year 9 pupils. In addition, the Gaia centre is being developed by the humanities faculty to provide a programme for gifted and talented pupils. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs are making good progress, and suitable materials are provided in lessons to ensure that they do so.

140. The high quality of teaching has a beneficial effect on the responses and behaviour of all pupils, who display very positive attitudes in class and clearly enjoy history lessons. They show great respect for their teachers and for each other. They also display strong levels of commitment, and respond very well to the high expectations of their teachers. For example, in a Year 10 lesson on Egyptian medicine, pupils showed considerable skill and commitment in analysing medical advances at that time.

141. An outstanding feature of the department's work is the rigorous and exhaustive system of assessment and recording. A very wide range of techniques is employed, including profile cards, work portfolios, accelerated learning programmes, and a very impressive emphasis on self-assessment and pupil participation in the whole process. The rigorous nature of assessment techniques gives pupils a detailed knowledge of how well they are doing, and is a major tool in the determined efforts to raise standards.

142. The subject has excellent management, and is part of a very effective humanities faculty in which there is a commendable emphasis on teamwork. The department now needs to develop a programme of visits, to support the taught curriculum. It also needs to consider the wider use of information and communications technology within history.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

143. At the end of Key Stage 3, standards are a little above national expectations, with pupils demonstrating considerable strengths in some aspects and relative weaknesses in others.

144. The strongest features of pupils' work are in accessing data from different sources, including extensive use of the Internet, manipulating different kinds of information, and presenting it using a variety of applications, including multimedia presentation software. In a Year 9 ICT lesson, for example, most pupils could combine Internet data with text and graphics to produce a slide presentation. The higher attaining pupils produced longer and more sophisticated outcomes that combined a wider range of sources and included sound and animation. These skills are used increasingly in their different subject areas, where pupils use ICT to help them develop and improve their ideas and quality of their work. Pupils also have a good understanding of computer control through their work in computer-aided design and manufacture.

145. Pupils' skills with spreadsheets are less developed, however, which limits their work on modelling patterns and testing predictions. The limited opportunities for data logging also limit pupils understanding of the uses of computers in measurement. Even so, pupils increasingly come into the school with stronger ICT skills, and then make good progress as a result of a more challenging Key Stage 3 taught programme and increased use in other subjects.

146. In Key Stage 4, until recently, two thirds of pupils continued to develop their ICT skills within GCSE information technology or business and information studies. In 1999, those pupils reached standards in line with the national average, with almost all gaining grades in the range A*-G, and over half achieving grades A*-C. Many pupils performed better in these subjects when compared with their average grades in other subjects. Standards were broadly

sustained in the GCSE results for 2000. Current standards in the Year 11 GCSE course are in line with national averages. In GCSE information technology lessons and work seen, pupils show particular strengths in the collection and presentation of data using the Internet and other sources for research. The higher attaining pupils are particularly creative in producing good quality outcomes in graphical work, and are able to critically evaluate their use of ICT. Pupils taking GCSE business and information studies use word processing and spreadsheets applications competently in, for example, their study of business finance, including break-even analysis. Other Year 11 pupils also show sound skills in the use of ICT in many of their other GCSE courses, predominantly for research and presentation of coursework.

147. In Year 10, all Key Stage 4 pupils now take GNVQ in ICT in place of the GCSE courses. The standards of work demonstrated in analysing documents were appropriate in an introductory course, with pupils working at intermediate and foundation levels. In those lessons, all pupils were capable of using word processing to produce data in text and table form. However, a number of lower attaining pupils, particularly those with special educational needs, experienced difficulty in coping with the evaluation and analysis tasks. In both Years 10 and 11, pupils are making good progress as a result of the increased curriculum time for the subject and developing opportunities for ICT in the different subjects.

148. At sixth form level, recent results in GCE A level have been well below the national average. Work by pupils presently in Year 13 also reflects a below average standard. Most pupils show sound technical skills but more limited theoretical understanding. However, standards in Year 12 are stronger in both the GCE A level group and in the network management training programme, where pupils show a secure understanding of computer systems. In the sixth form, most pupils are now achieving well in ICT, as a result of improved access to facilities and the introduction of key skills.

149. Pupils in all years are very positive about the increasing opportunities for ICT, and this is reflected in the full use of the computer suites before and after school. In lessons, behaviour is mostly very good with pupils eager to show their skills and act as mentors to others.

150. Teaching is mostly good or better, and in a third of lessons is very good. Lessons are usually well prepared, with increasing use of electronic presentation that engages the interest of pupils and provides key learning points. Very good use is made of exemplar materials, as well as clear assessment criteria that help pupils understand the targets and ways of achieving them. Positive class management is evident in all lessons, with the best practice showing effective questioning techniques that actively involve the pupils and identify where help is most needed. This is particularly important in the large Key Stage 3 classes, and helps ensure that all pupils are able to make progress in the lesson. Most teachers have secure specialist knowledge and a strong interest in the subject, particularly in the Year 12 courses where pupils are well motivated and show a developing understanding. However, on occasions, an enthusiasm to share knowledge is at the expense of helping less strong GCE A level pupils to develop effective note-taking skills. While there is much good work in the GNVQ course in Years 10 and 12, some staff new to the course are less clear about that style of assessment and so less able to guide pupils. Further, the need to sustain a high work rate in the Year 10 GNVQ leads to a tendency to train pupils for a particular outcome, which limits their range of response.

151. The headteacher and the curriculum and technical development managers provide excellent leadership, with a clear vision of how they want ICT to develop. This is reflected in improved facilities in most subject areas and developing links with parents through the Internet. While development is far from complete, there is considerable staff interest and goodwill. The provision of notebook computers for all teachers is proving an effective way of supporting ICT training, enhancing teaching and learning, and improving ways of monitoring pupil progress. The school as a technology college has over 350 computers for pupils on a single educational network, including nearly one hundred wireless notebook computers, with very good in house support for both technical development and staff training.

152. Much of this development has led to a rapid increase in the use of ICT in most subject areas, and to improvements in standards in all key stages since the last inspection. The new Key Stage 3 scheme of work has good features. The Key Stage 4 GNVQ gives all pupils a valuable and very ambitious target of a qualification equivalent to four GCSE passes, albeit in limited curriculum time and in different locations with varying access to wider resources.

153. In what is an otherwise very positive area of provision, there are a number of aspects to be fully addressed. There are underdeveloped areas in the taught course in Years 7-9, and the school has yet to take stock of the increasing use of ICT in different subjects and map it against the Key Stage 3 programme of study. The wider staff is not involved in assessing pupils' ICT progress, though there are plans for some participation in the Key Stage 4 GNVQ provision.

Business Studies

154. Results in GCSE business studies in 1999 were close to the national average. Pupils performed better in the subject than in their other GCSE courses, and boys achieved significantly better than girls. In 2000, well over half of pupils gained grades in the A*-C range, and boys and girls performed equally well. Current work broadly reflects the national average, with Year 11 pupils demonstrating a sound understanding of economic terms in a business simulation. Recent results in both GCE A level and GNVQ Advanced have been encouraging for the small numbers taking the courses, with most pupils gaining passes. In work seen, standards in the GCE Advanced level course are a little below the national average, though most pupils are achieving well in relation to their prior attainment. In lessons, pupils are able to use business theory with guidance, though they are less confident in applying their knowledge to actual political and economic contexts.

155. Teaching is never less than satisfactory, and it is good in half of lessons. Teachers use their specialist knowledge well. They plan their lessons thoroughly and so help pupils develop a sound understanding of the subject. Expectations are high for the effort required in class and homework, and this contributes significantly to the good progress most pupils make in their learning. Effective use is made of questioning and discussion, though, on occasion, the key learning points are not sufficiently summarised to consolidate knowledge and understanding. Pupils value the subject and the opportunities it provides for industry links and class activities. This is reflected in the continuing popularity of GCSE, and the significant increase in numbers taking GCE A level.

156. Although business studies is no longer the main vehicle for ICT provision in Key Stage 4, it continues to provide valuable opportunities for pupils to improve computer skills. For example, in studying business finance, pupils develop data handling and modelling skills through the use of spreadsheets. To support this work, information and communication technology resources have improved since the last inspection, though on occasion there are insufficient workstations to provide for the larger GCSE groups. The business studies provision is well managed within a larger faculty. Staff organise a valuable range of industrial and commercial links, including pupil participation in regional business competitions. Business studies was recognised as a successful and popular subject in the last inspection, and the GCSE and GCE Advanced level courses continue to make a valuable contribution to the school curriculum.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

157. Attainment at Key Stage 3 has improved steadily in French and German since the last inspection. Although standards in lessons remain below national expectations overall, the proportion of pupils working at average levels has increased significantly. Girls' attainment is higher than that of boys, but in no greater proportion than found nationally.

158. Most pupils, especially lower attaining pupils and pupils with special educational needs, make good progress relative to their ability throughout Key Stage 3. Higher attaining pupils make slower progress in Year 8, but they reach a satisfactory standard in relation to their prior learning by the end of the key stage.

159. Pupils understand French and German well. They are used to hearing both languages spoken freely with increasing complexity by their teachers, and can pick out detail from taped passages. They sustain lengthy dialogues about themselves very effectively using simple, set phrases. Speaking competitions, which are recorded on video, have improved their pronunciation and increased their confidence significantly. However, even though they hear them regularly, they make little attempt to use either language spontaneously in the classroom or adapt what they learn to personalise their conversation. They read easily, as they have experience of a stimulating range of readers and carefully chosen work sheets to supplement their course book. All pupils are able to write simply about themselves and their everyday life. Higher attaining pupils generally do not make their writing more interesting with a wider range of vocabulary or idiom, and much of the work of average attaining pupils is very careless. Pupils use ICT to improve their presentation, but their redrafted work still contains basic inaccuracies from the first version. Most pupils are developing a good understanding of grammar. They are able to explain why language forms are as they are, but are less secure in applying these concepts in their own writing.

160. Attainment at Key Stage 4 has also improved steadily over the last four years. Although remaining well below national averages, the number of pupils gaining passes in the A*-C range in the last two years shows a significant improvement since the last inspection. Boys entered for German in 1999 achieved as well in this subject as in their other subjects, and as well as boys did nationally. Girls did less well in this respect. Work observed during the inspection shows that overall improvement is being maintained, with pupils in the current Year 10 making better progress than the current Year 11. Pupils' skills in listening and

reading develop satisfactorily over the key stage. Many work successfully to improve their accents and intonation in the spoken language. For some, a period of work experience in France increased their fluency considerably. In the current Year 10, higher attaining pupils are beginning to introduce some originality into their written work, adapting past material and using dictionaries sensibly. However, pupils' writing in general still lacks the range of more complex structures, idiom and vocabulary for higher grades to be achieved more consistently.

161. All teaching in French and German and across both key stages is at least satisfactory. The majority is good with one in three lessons being very good or excellent. Teachers are, for the most part, very effective managers of pupils. As a result, classrooms are well-ordered places where the atmosphere is conducive to learning. Pupils show interest in what they are doing, and work well in pairs, groups and individually. The friendly rapport between teachers and pupils and amongst pupils gives pupils the self-confidence to succeed. This was particularly the case where a group of Year 8 pupils with special educational needs were all able to exceed their target of memorising a list of vocabulary by encouraging each other in the game of 'Who wants to be a millionaire?' Pupils learn most effectively where the lessons are well planned. This means that they can be conducted at a brisk pace and cover all four skill areas, with a variety of tasks chosen carefully to appeal to pupils' interests. Games, songs and competition are woven into the lesson, and there is plenty of material at hand to suit the capability of individual pupils. Tasks are thoroughly consolidated to give pupils confidence before attempting the next one. A Year 10 German class produced interesting character sketches of famous personalities after a very well sequenced introduction from their teacher, using a laptop and digital projector.

162. Learning is less effective where control of the class is weaker or the extra expertise of support teachers is not used to its full potential. Most work is marked regularly, usually with encouragement and good advice for improvement. Occasionally marking is more superficial, allowing pupils to become careless in the presentation of their work. Good quality homework that extends and consolidates learning is set and checked regularly. Teachers pay satisfactory attention to the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Pupils have regular access to computers, to help them with the consolidation of grammar and vocabulary and with the presentation of their written work.

163. The leadership and management of the department is good. All teachers are suitably qualified or experienced to teach either French or German which makes for a good, very close working relationship between members of the team. Monitoring of teaching is starting to impact on improving standards of attainment. Assessment is beginning to be used effectively to evaluate and improve curricular provision. A very effective programme for monitoring and counselling individual pupils is built into the termly timetable. The provision for modern foreign languages has improved since the last inspection. A good supply of additional material is being developed for gifted and talented pupils in separate accommodation. They also have extra, individual help from foreign language assistants. Pupils with special educational needs are taught a modified course within the special unit by a language specialist. However, modern foreign languages in Key Stage 4 remain within an options structure where pupils may choose or not choose them as they wish. This arrangement does not comply with statutory regulations.

MUSIC

164. Results in the most recent GCSE examinations were below the national average, though this conceals the fact that four of the nine pupils obtained very good results. Teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 showed a majority of pupils working up to and at the expected level, with a significant number beyond it. Current standards are above expectation at Key Stages 3 and 4, and notably so in Year 10. Standards are high in the sixth form.

165. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils have gained a secure grasp of the skills needed to appraise, compose and perform music. This is due largely to the extensive review of the syllabus since the last inspection, and also to the production of developmental programmes of study for use with the music technology. Pupils are familiar with traditional notation, and are subsequently confident in writing and improvising melodies, adding major and minor chords and rhythmic backing to them. Graphic scores and notation are successfully used in a focused and creative manner. Pupils have a well-developed feeling for ethnic music, being able to appraise and perform in the style of various world cultures. One Year 9 class worked with great conviction, many of the pupils to level 5 standard, on a Reggae improvisation with three independent melodic lines, the correct rhythmic beat and a suitable orchestral colouring. Ensemble work is fluent and largely well co-ordinated. Carefully produced worksheets for practical work enable less able pupils to achieve reasonable standards and more able pupils to be extended. The worksheets are a strong component in the successful delivery of the curriculum. It is good practice that pupils who learn orchestral, band and other instruments through visiting teachers are encouraged to use them in class ensemble work. This raises their standards, and gives a broader dimension to the quality of practical work presented in lessons.

166. Current standards of achievement at Key Stage 4 are good, and suggest that quite a large number of pupils should achieve in line with the national average by the end of the course next year, and even better in the following year. Improvisation skills are well developed, especially by those who play traditional orchestral and band instruments. Many creative and adventurous examples were observed during the inspection. Pupils use computers to great effect for composition purposes, being able to write melodies, harmonies, rhythms and appropriate instrumentation with considerable accuracy. Many pupils have quite advanced aural analysis and critical skills. Sixth form pupils have advanced practical skills and well-developed powers of stylistic and formal analysis.

167. The use of ICT at all key stages, both by teachers for teaching purposes and by the pupils for practical work, is a great success and a strength of the department. Comprehensive developmental programmes of study have been produced, which enable pupils to acquire the skills needed to address National Curriculum requirements. The school has invested considerable capital into music technology, and this is showing excellent dividends in the raising of standards and the broadening of pupils' experience. It has also been influential in attracting more boys to the subject.

168. Both boys and girls have good attitudes to music at Key Stage 3 and very good attitudes at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. At Key Stage 3, they particularly enjoy working with the music technology and demonstrate focus and a sense of purpose when using it. They appear to be interested in and to enjoy their music lessons, so they concentrate closely in

group and whole-class work. At Key Stage 4, pupils perform confidently in front of each other, articulate clearly when explaining what they are doing, and are self-critical when appraising their own work. Sixth form pupils demonstrate a responsible attitude to the rigorous demands of the course.

169. The quality of teaching is uniformly very good across all key stages. Members of the department are notably technologically aware, and this is having a striking impact upon the delivery of the curriculum. There is a cohesion in the way in which the subject is taught, which ensures that courses are thoroughly delivered. Teachers have high expectations of pupils of all ability, and make provision to raise the standards of all. Lessons are well planned and progressive, with the correct amount of variety of activity and pace. Teachers are secure in their subject knowledge, are good practising musicians, and have a thorough awareness of the ability and potential of their pupils. Progress is good at all key stages, due largely to pupils' positive attitudes and to the comprehensive way in which music technology is used.

170. There have been a number of significant improvements since the last inspection, including improved musical skills through keyboard work and better resourcing. The subject is very well led and managed, and now operates effectively within the physical education and Performing Arts Faculty. It contributes substantially to the social and cultural life of very many pupils in the school. All music teachers are thoroughly conversant with the facilities and potential of information and music technology, and this, together with streamlined assessment procedures, is a strength of the department.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

171. In the teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 2000, the majority of pupils achieved at or above national expectations. GCSE results for 1999 were significantly above the national average. Although the results for 2000 were below the national average, trends are upwards. Attainment for other pupils by the end of Key Stage 4 and for those in the sixth form is above national expectations.

172. By the end of Key Stage 3, the attainment of the majority of pupils conforms to national expectations in all areas of the physical education curriculum. Most pupils are able to apply the techniques, skills and competition rules to several aspects of the physical education curriculum, including hockey, dance, gymnastics and rugby. Basic skills are sound and provide a platform for future development. In hockey, many Year 8 girls are able to use the push pass accurately and make effective use of space. Shooting skills are well developed and the girls also have a good knowledge of the rules of the game. Year 9 boys have good basic handling and passing skills in rugby and are beginning to develop some tactical awareness. Higher attaining pupils are able to refine these basic techniques and incorporate them into the game situation. Many Year 8 boys can also build a simple sequence in gymnastics using basic balance and linking movements. Boys of less than average ability in Year 9 trampolining demonstrate good body tension, and can complete a range of basic movements. In a Year 8 netball lesson, girls of less than average ability were able to pass the ball with speed and accuracy, showing sound tactical awareness. The ability of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 to observe and analyse performance is significantly above national expectations.

173. At Key Stage 4, pupils in a Year 10 GCSE practical lesson were able to observe performance in a trampolining lesson and analyse this to considerably improve both their own performance and that of other pupils in the lesson. These pupils also have a very good understanding of the importance of exercise, and are beginning to develop the ability to design and utilise training programmes for specific sporting activities. There are many examples of pupils at both key stages becoming very good independent learners, and pupils are given the opportunity to either take responsibility or display initiative in all of their lessons. The work of Year 13 students illustrates a good understanding of physiology, anatomy and the psychology of sport. In their practical work, there is a very good grasp of both the theory and practice of using observation and analysis of performance to assist improvement.

174. Pupils learn and make good or very good progress in most lessons at Key Stage 3, and progress is never less than satisfactory. Pupils are encouraged to develop not only skills, but also a good understanding of the techniques and rules. In all Key Stage 3 lessons, pupils demonstrate increasing control and levels of accuracy in a range of skills. An example of very good progress for pupils was observed in a Year 8 dance lesson, where girls developed the ability to create and perform their own dances using an increasing range of their own and prescribed movement patterns. In a Year 9 trampolining lesson, boys significantly improved both the quality of their movement and their ability to analyse and subsequently improve performance. Progress in observing and evaluating performance is being successfully developed in many lessons.

175. At Key Stage 4, progress and learning is usually very good. In GCSE practical lessons, pupils of all abilities develop basic trampolining skills and an increasingly complex sequence of movements through analysis of their own and other pupils' performance. Good learning and progress were also illustrated in a Year 10 lesson on health related fitness, where boys developed an increasing understanding of how preparation, training and fitness relate to and affect performance. Evaluation of individual performance by staff is used to improve standards during all lessons. Target setting for whole classes is a feature of most lessons. Target setting for individual pupils, using National Curriculum levels that are known and understood by all pupils, is a significant factor in the progress being made in most lessons. In the sixth form, very good progress was illustrated by students working with Key Stage 4 pupils in the observation and analysis of performance to effect improvement. The identification of gifted and talented pupils and the provision of some enrichment for them is beginning to have an impact. In all lessons, pupils of all abilities, including those with special needs make good progress. A very good range of extra-curricular activities and fixtures with other schools provides many opportunities for pupils to extend and develop their skills.

176. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive at both key stages. Most are enthusiastic, well behaved, and co-operative, demonstrating a real enjoyment of the subject. They are attentive, and their capacity to sustain concentration is usually good. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff are very good. There are many opportunities for pupils to work independently and collaboratively at both key stages, and opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and to undertake different roles such as coach or official are a feature of all lessons.

177. The quality of teaching is good or very good in most lessons at both key stages, and was never less than satisfactory. Very good teaching was seen in a range of Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 lessons. A secure knowledge of the subject is regularly conveyed to pupils through perceptive observation of performance, appropriate intervention and good teacher-directed question and answer sessions. Thorough planning is a feature of many lessons, incorporating varied teaching strategies and an appropriate sequence of activities involving both individual and collaborative learning. Discipline and class management are good. Assessment of performance during lessons by pupils and teachers is regularly used to enhance teaching and learning. The recording of assessments is a feature of almost all lessons, using specific criteria for each activity linked to the National Curriculum. Pupils are involved in assessment, to help them set targets for their own improvement.

178. A good range of activities at Key Stage 4 is providing a sound preparation for Post 16 leisure activities. Schemes of work are very good working documents. They include guidance on developing the potential of pupils of differing abilities, ensuring that all pupils have the opportunity to make appropriate progress. The head of subject, who is also the head of the performing arts faculty, provides outstanding leadership, and this has been a significant factor in raising standards. Weekly departmental meetings ensure that appropriate curriculum and staff development takes place. Formal monitoring and review of teaching in the department is a significant factor in ensuring that the focus on teaching and learning is translated into good practice in the classroom. The recent formation of a faculty of performing arts is already beginning to provide valuable opportunities for music and physical education to collaborate in curricular and extra-curricular enrichment.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

179. In the 1999 examinations, the proportion of pupils gaining passes in the A*-C range was below the national norms for the subject. The average points score was also below the national average score. However, pupils' performance was higher than in the majority of other subjects for which they were entered. There has also been a very significant long-term trend towards improvement. This was maintained in the year 2000 examinations, when a markedly higher proportion of pupils gained grade A*-C passes than in 1999.

180. In work seen during the inspection, the attainment of pupils following the Agreed Syllabus was in line with its expectations at ages 14 and 16. The majority have a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the richness and diversity of religion, of the place of Christianity and other principal religions in the country, and of their distinctive features. They have a sound grasp of religious language, concepts and symbols. They understand why the beliefs of practising members of faith communities are important to them, and how they shape their lives. Within that context, their skills in making a personal response to religious and ethical questions are particularly well developed.

181. At Key Stage 3, the majority of pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress. At Key Stage 4, they also make very good progress, whether they are pursuing the Agreed Syllabus, or studying Sikhism and Islam for the GCSE examination. This is a reflection of both the very good teaching of the subject and the very good attitudes of pupils towards it. Most pupils are very well motivated, come to lessons keen to learn, and

take pride in their work. They behave very well, and enjoy very good relationships with each other and with their teachers. They listen with respect to other's views and opinions, as was well evidenced in a Year 9 discussion on Martin Luther King's 'freedom' speech, and the issues surrounding racial segregation.

182. At both key stages, the quality of teaching is very good overall, and excellent in over a third of lessons. Where teaching is strongest, teachers have a very good command of their subject, and have high expectations of pupils. They engage their interest and stretch them intellectually, through a variety of imaginative and challenging activities and tasks, which are well matched to their individual needs. Thus, for example, Year 8 pupils held group interviews of five leaders of local church communities, and made very good gains in understanding their spiritual role in society. Teachers give pupils very good opportunities for developing the skills of collaborative and independent learning. For example, Year 10 pupils studying the ethics of capital punishment shared the outcomes of their work in group discussion. Teachers give pupils ownership of their learning, and encourage them to evaluate their own and others' performance against clearly understood levels of attainment. This was well seen in paired evaluation of work on suffering and bereavement in Year 11. Very good marking also helps pupils to understand how to raise their achievement. Meaningful homework is set to extend learning in class. This very good teaching is underpinned by the very good relationships that teachers enjoy with pupils, based on caring and mutual respect.

183. The quality of leadership and management of the subject is excellent. Within the faculty, there is a very strong ethic of teamwork, based on common values, a commitment to high achievement, and the sharing of best practice, which has a significant impact on standards and quality of education. There has been very good improvement overall since the previous inspection. If standards are to be further raised, the school should now meet its statutory responsibility to make provision for the Agreed Syllabus to be taught in the sixth form.