

INSPECTION REPORT

BLACON HIGH SCHOOL

Melbourne Road, Chester

LEA area: Cheshire

Unique reference number: 111396

Headteacher: Mr P McNulty

Reporting inspector: Mr J Paddick
10308

Dates of inspection: 14 - 17 February 2000

Inspection number: 182888

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Community

Age range of pupils: 11 - 16

Gender of pupils: Mixed

School address: Melbourne Road
Blacon
Chester
Postcode: CH1 5JH

Telephone number: 01244 371475

Fax number: 01244 374279

Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr G R White

Date of previous inspection: 3 – 7 November 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mr John Paddick	Registered inspector		Characteristics and effectiveness of the school
			School's results and pupils' achievements
			Teaching and learning
			Leadership and management
			Key issues for action
Mrs Sarah Drake	Lay inspector		Pupils' welfare and health and safety
			Partnership with parents and carers
Mrs June Tracey	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Mr Leslie Robarts	Team inspector	English	
Mr Joseph McDermott	Team inspector	Science	
Mr John Clay	Team inspector	Information technology and Design and technology	
Mr Douglas Howorth	Team inspector	Geography	
Mr Anthony Pearson	Team inspector	History	
Mr John Ratcliffe	Team inspector	French	
Mrs Thelma McIntosh	Team inspector	Music	Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
Mrs Gillian Salter-Smith	Team inspector	Physical education	Quality and range of opportunities for learning
Mr Michael Miller	Team inspector	Art and Religious education	
Mr Joseph Clark	Team inspector		Special educational needs and equal opportunities
Mr Brian Leek	Team inspector		

The inspection contractor was:

North West Education Services Ltd
Shieling House
Lamberts Lane
Congleton
Cheshire
CW12 3AU

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33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Blacon High School is a small mixed 11-16 comprehensive school with 589 pupils on roll. The number of pupils on roll is rising slowly as the school's reputation improves. The school serves an area with severe socio-economic disadvantage. Unemployment is very high, and at least three times the national average because the area is still affected by the closure of Shotton Steelworks. The proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals is over twice the national average. The profile of attainment of the pupils on entry to the school is usually well below average, and this, coupled with the socio-economic factors, presents the school with a considerable challenge. Special educational needs pupils make up a slightly greater proportion of the school's roll than is found nationally but the number with statements is over three times the national average. There are very few pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds, and no pupils with English as an additional language.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Blacon High School is an improving school. The serious weaknesses found at the time of the previous inspection in 1997 have been largely eliminated. Clearly, standards are rising, particularly in Key Stage 3, and almost every pupil leaves the school with at least five graded GCSE results. This is a considerable achievement considering the proportion of each cohort which has special educational needs. Pupils of all levels of attainment make at least the progress which they should as they move through the school, and there is every opportunity for high attainers to achieve good GCSE results. The school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- Strong leadership and good management at all levels are effective in improving the school and raising standards.
- Teaching is of good quality overall.
- The level of care provided for the pupils is good, and the school is welcoming.
- Special educational needs provision is now good.
- There are good relationships between the staff and pupils, and the school offers an orderly environment for learning.
- The facilities for physical education are very good. They are shared with the local community which values them greatly.

What could be improved

- GCSE results could still be improved, especially at grades A*-C.
- Despite the best efforts of the school, the poor attendance of a minority of pupils is affecting their chances in life. Some parents keep pupils at home for inadequate reasons.
- Although the school tries hard to involve parents in their children's learning, too many do not attend parents' evenings.
- There are insufficient opportunities for pupils to learn independently. This affects the way in which many pupils prepare for GCSE.
- A minority of pupils in each year group have unsatisfactory attitudes to learning and this slows progress in a small number of classes.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in November 1997. At that time, although it provided an adequate standard of education, it nevertheless had serious weaknesses. Improvement has been rapid. The serious weaknesses connected with development planning, special needs provision, subject schemes of work, and a rather unstable environment for the development of subject teaching have all been eliminated. Further improvements can still be made to some schemes of work and with the linking of subject development plans to the whole school plan. However, any weaknesses in these areas are not serious. The school has been successful in improving teaching, particularly in Key Stage 3. Results in National Curriculum tests in Year 9 have improved, as has the overall quality of the school's performance at GCSE. The attendance of pupils

as a whole, however, remains low, although the school puts great energy into improving it.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14 and 16 year olds based on average point scores in National Curriculum tests and GCSE.

Performance in:	compared with				Key well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
	All schools			similar schools	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
Key Stage 3 Tests	E	E	E	B	
GCSE Results	D	E	E	C	

Standards of attainment are generally well below average in English, mathematics and science when the pupils join the school in Year 7. As a result of good teaching, standards improve in age-related terms by the end of Key Stage 3, especially in English. Key Stage 3 results have improved since 1997 at the same rate as they have nationally but they are still well below the national average. However, the results compare well with those from other similar schools which have such a high proportion of pupils qualifying for free school meals. Standards of work seen in lessons at this key stage are below average. They are highest in French. In most other subjects pupils do better than would be expected from their attainment on entry to the school.

The GCSE results in 1999 were average for schools taking their pupils from similar backgrounds. As in 1997 and 1998, the school did particularly well in 1999 in exceeding the national average for all schools for the proportion of Year 11 pupils who achieved five GCSE results in the range A*-G. Almost every pupil, including those with special educational needs, gained at least one graded result. Results in the range A*-C have fallen slightly over the same period but they have matched the overall fall in the profile of pupils' attainment on entry to Year 7. Work seen in lessons and exercise books shows that standards are at least being maintained compared with 1999 in the run up to GCSE. Standards are above average compared with the country as a whole in GCSE classes in Year 11 in history and physical education. They are average in music. In all other National Curriculum subjects they are either below or well below average. However, in most subjects, standards are at least as high as could be expected from prior results at age 14 or on entry to the school.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils' attitudes to school are unsatisfactory overall because attendance is too low. Attitudes in class are often good and rarely less than satisfactory.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is satisfactory overall. Most pupils behave well in class and around school. A small minority of pupils exhibit challenging behaviour but staff normally deal with it well.
Personal development and relationships	The personal development of pupils is good. Many exhibit mature social attitudes. Personal relationships are also good.
Attendance	The attendance of pupils is poor despite the school's considerable efforts to improve it. The truancy rate is three times the national average. Too often pupils are kept off school for invalid reasons. The poor attendance by a minority of pupils is affecting their GCSE prospects and life chances generally.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Satisfactory	N/A

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 was satisfactory or better in 96 per cent of lessons and good or better in 65 per cent. Thirteen per cent of lessons were very good, and very occasionally excellent. The four per cent of lessons which were unsatisfactory were observed in mathematics, science and religious education. Provision for special educational needs pupils is good. At Key Stage 3, teaching in English and science is good, and in mathematics it is satisfactory. At Key Stage 4, teaching in these three core subjects is satisfactory. Teaching in Key Stage 3 is good overall and is well matched to the needs of the pupils. The planning and structure of lessons, often dividing the hour up into precise sections, continually changes the focus of the work and usually keeps even the most challenging of pupils busy. Attention to the development of literacy skills is well co-ordinated across the subjects of the curriculum. In Key Stage 4, teaching is satisfactory overall but it has a common weakness in several subjects. Pupils are too dependent on their teachers because there has not been sufficient emphasis on the development of study skills throughout the key stage. Consequently, many pupils do not develop independent learning skills or revise from textbooks and other sources of information sufficiently at home. The setting of homework for pupils of all ages does not have a high enough profile in some subjects. Often pupils are able to complete it far too quickly when it is a matter of finishing off work started in class.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum has appropriate breadth and balance, except for the insufficient time for religious education in Key Stage 4. There are good arrangements for equal opportunities. The extra-curricular provision is good, especially in music and physical education.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Provision has improved rapidly since the previous inspection, and is now good.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	The school does much to develop pupils' personal qualities in and out of school. Arrangements for the promotion of moral, social and cultural development are all good. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The monitoring of pupils' progress and personal development are good. There are very good levels of personal support and guidance for pupils. Procedures for tackling bullying, when it occurs, are very good, and pupils feel secure in school. There are good systems for promoting mature behaviour. The school is approachable and does its best to promote an effective partnership with parents.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher and deputy head provide the school with very good leadership. They have been responsible, with the help of good middle managers, for the rapid improvement made since the last inspection. The school now no longer has the serious weaknesses which were evident in 1997. Development planning, however, still requires more cohesion; subject plans do not fully inform the whole school plan.

How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors fulfil their responsibilities in an energetic and generally satisfactory fashion, and have the interests of the pupils at heart. They ask searching questions of subject managers. However, there is no formal system for the review and monitoring of their policies. Neither the school prospectus nor the annual report to parents fully meets statutory requirements. Arrangements for collective worship do not meet legal requirements.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The headteacher, deputy, and governors monitor standards and quality well. They are aware of most of the school's strengths and weaknesses and constantly strive to improve standards. Action taken to meet the school's targets is very good.
The strategic use of resources	Staffing, accommodation and learning resources are generally adequate. The very good physical education accommodation is very well used in partnership with the community. All resources are generally managed prudently to maximise pupils' opportunities. However, text books could be used to greater effect if they were to be issued for use at home as well as at school. The principles of best value are applied well.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school. • They believe that teaching is good, and pupils are expected to achieve well. • They would feel comfortable about approaching the school. • The school is well led and managed. • There is a good range of extra-curricular activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are concerns about homework. • There are some concerns that the school does not work closely enough with parents. • There are some concerns about behaviour. • Some parents believe that they are not sufficiently informed about their child's progress.

Inspectors agree with parents' positive views. They are right, however, to be concerned about homework. Although it is set fairly regularly, it is not planned sufficiently as an integral part of the curriculum. Hence it is often just finishing off work started in class. Quicker workers have little to do in some subjects. It is rarely designed to improve pupils' study skills by involving research work from text books. Poor behaviour does affect the rate of progress in some lessons. However, the number affected is small. Behaviour is normally good. Inspectors do not agree that the school does not work closely enough with parents. The school actually puts much effort into this aspect of its work. The response of parents is poor. Only half of them attend meetings to discuss their children's progress at school.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. The attainment of Year 9 pupils in the National Curriculum tests in 1999, taking the core subjects, English, mathematics and science together, was well below average compared with all maintained schools. However, results were above average compared with schools taking their pupils from similar backgrounds. Girls outperformed boys in English by more than the national difference but in mathematics and science differences were small. Since 1997, the overall trend in Key Stage 3 results has been upwards at a rate which is similar to the national rise.
2. Results in the Key Stage 3 tests in 1999 were better than expected from the Key Stage 2 scores achieved by the same pupils when they entered the school. Science results were largely as expected, mathematics were slightly better than expected, and the English results demonstrated clear gains in standards of attainment. The 1999 results were not as strong as 1998, when all three subjects were above average compared with similar schools. This was because the attainment profile of the 1999 intake was lower than that in 1998.
3. The proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A*-C in 1999 was well below average compared with all maintained schools, as it had been in 1997 and 1998. It was below average compared with schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds. However, the proportion of pupils achieving five results in the range A*-G was well above average compared with all schools, and very high compared with similar schools. Overall point score per pupil was average for similar schools. Girls did better than boys at GCSE in 1999, as they did nationally.
4. The proportion of pupils achieving five higher grade GCSE results in 1999 was largely as expected from both the NFER scores on entry to the school and the results in the core subjects at the end of Key Stage 3, indicating that these pupils achieved satisfactorily. The school does well to ensure that almost every pupil is examined at GCSE in at least one subject, especially as there are so many pupils with special educational needs. Not only were they almost all examined in 1999; over 95 per cent left the school with five graded GCSE results, a figure which is above the national average for all schools and a credit to their teachers.
5. Individual subject GCSE results in 1999 were all well below average in terms of the proportion of the entry achieving A*-C, apart from music where the small class achieved broadly average results compared with the rest of the country. The strongest results in the range A*-C were achieved in English and English literature, design and technology, and geography. Results in mathematics and science were broadly average for the school but those in art, business education, history and information studies were generally weaker than those in other subjects taken at the same time.
6. Pupils enter the school each year with well below average National Curriculum test results at the end of Key Stage 2. Reading ages are also well below average. Pupils make good overall progress through Key Stage 3 as a consequence of the good teaching which they receive. Currently, standards of attainment in lessons and work samples at the end of Key Stage 3 are below average for age in most subjects but this represents added value and hence good achievement compared with the starting point in Year 7. Only in geography and design and technology are standards well below average. Standards are average in physical education and above average in French.
7. Clearly standards are rising in the school, particularly in Key Stage 3. Current levels of

attainment in lessons and work samples in Key Stage 4 are better than the 1999 GCSE results would suggest. Attainment at the end of the key stage is well below average in English, and below average in science and mathematics. It is well below average in design and technology, information technology, art and geography. Standards are below average in French but average in music. In history and physical education, attainment is above average for age. The school has set a target of 25 per cent of the cohort to achieve five or more GCSE results at A*-C. It is a challenging target but progress is currently commensurate with its achievement. If achieved, the 25 per cent would represent a considerable gain on 1999.

8. Although standards are rising at both key stages, it is evident that pupils make more progress at Key Stage 3 than in Key Stage 4. Teaching is better in this key stage, and more closely directed towards short term targets, which enable pupils in many subjects to make rapid gains in the acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding. Progress slows in Key Stage 4 because pupils are not equipped with sufficient study skills to learn independently and to meet the requirements of GCSE. Textbooks are often kept in school rather than being issued to allow pupils to revise, develop understanding, and make notes. Consequently, pupils have to rely very heavily on what they can absorb from lessons. The poor attendance of a significant minority of pupils slows their rate of progress, as does the incidence of unsatisfactory attitudes of a minority of pupils in a few classes.
9. Literacy skills are weak when pupils enter the school at the beginning of Year 7. The well co-ordinated programme, which includes all subjects, lifts standards from their low starting point. Consequently listening, reading and writing all improve, providing the pupils with many of the basic skills necessary to make progress across the curriculum. Speaking skills are improved through answering teachers' questions in lessons; however, there is insufficient emphasis on short presentations, group discussion and debate, so oral skills remain under-developed.
10. Numeracy skills are weak but they are being improved, especially through mathematics lessons in Key Stage 3. A thoughtfully prepared school policy is being put into practice across the curriculum with some success. However, too many pupils still reach for their calculators to work out simple sums and products which they ought to know how to work out in their heads.
11. Pupils are able to use their information technology skills in unfamiliar contexts across the curriculum. Their competence at using basic software is average; most can create and use databases, produce well laid out documents involving text and graphics, and use spreadsheets to organise and present information. They use these skills with confidence in many subjects.
12. The school makes use of national data in analysing the test and examination results of boys and girls and is aware of boys' underachievement in relation to girls. In an attempt to improve boys' attainment at the end of Key Stage 4, single gender mathematics sets have been established in Years 9 and 10. However, some subjects, such as art and religious education, do not analyse their GCSE results sufficiently for gender imbalance.
13. Most pupils with special educational needs attain the standards of which they are capable, and make good progress. The vast majority are entered for GCSE examinations. In 1999 all pupils entered for English and English Literature examinations gained a GCSE certificate at Grade A*-G. Pupils are tested for reading on entry to the school and at the end of Year 7, when most can be seen to have made good progress in improving their reading ages.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

14. The vast majority of pupils have positive attitudes and are enthusiastic about the school. They appreciate the friendliness and approachability of the staff and value the range of

opportunities the school offers. In particular they value the support available from members of staff if they have problems of any kind, either with work or personal difficulties. Pupils generally arrive properly prepared for different lessons. In physical education the standards of kit are high and pupils who play orchestral instruments remember to bring these to class lessons as well as to instrumental lessons and rehearsals. Pupils feel safe in the school environment and believe that rare cases of bullying and intimidation are dealt with firmly and fairly.

15. Behaviour both in class and around the school is generally good. The school makes great effort to avoid excluding pupils and does so only when all other means of support have been examined. Six pupils have been permanently excluded in the past year. Numbers of fixed term exclusions are relatively high but they are a consequence of the school insisting on acceptable standards of behaviour. Relationships are good, and pupils respond well to teachers' high expectations, settle promptly in lessons and listen attentively. Most take a pride in the standard of presentation of written work. The relatively small amount of challenging behaviour is often the response of a minority of pupils to work which is not well matched to their capabilities. Most teachers manage pupils with immature attitudes or behavioural difficulties skilfully and sympathetically, and the disruption to teaching and learning is limited. However, on some occasions the amount of time taken to deal with difficult situations seriously affects the pace of lessons. A number of pupils with limited concentration spans respond best to lessons in which they are set a series of short tasks. For pupils with special educational needs in Key Stage 4, lessons of two hours' length are too long for their concentration span. Pupils listen with respect to one another's points of view, but many lack confidence in contributing to discussions and adopt passive attitudes, particularly in art and religious education.
16. Pupils with special educational needs generally show a willingness to learn and respond well in lessons. They mix well with other pupils and are fully integrated into the daily life of the school. Behaviour in class is usually good but a small minority of pupils, when not sufficiently engaged in the lesson, can be disruptive and prevent other pupils from learning.
17. The school provides a number of opportunities for pupils to develop initiative and to take responsibility. Individual tutor groups organise fund-raising events for charity, and an annual twenty-four hour famine raises in excess of £800 for Christian Aid. Pupils in Year 11 act as guides on parents' evenings and look after new pupils in Year 7. In their turn, pupils from Year 7 look after pupils from feeder primary schools on their introduction day. In lessons, pupils act responsibly when handling equipment, and several take care of the animals in the pet centre during weekends and holidays. High quality musical instruments are on long-term loan to around eighty pupils who take great care to ensure that these are properly maintained. Pupils work well together in pairs and groups in games lessons. However, within most other lessons there are relatively few opportunities for pupils to take any responsibility for their own learning, and research skills are inhibited by lack of access to textbooks for homework. The artistic response in both art and music is low in imagination and willingness to take creative risks.
18. Despite much focused effort on the part of the school, the levels of pupils' attendance are poor, and well below the national average. The average for the most recent full academic year is much the same as that at the time of the previous inspection. Levels of unauthorised absence are very high. Some of the absence is condoned by parents who consider that, for example, the minding of siblings at home is more useful to their older children than attendance at school.
19. In the most recent academic year, only Year 7 had attendance higher than the overall national average; the attendance of all other year groups was well below ninety per cent. The figures for the autumn term just completed show a slight improvement on those for the same period in the previous academic year. During the first half of the current academic year over one third

of pupils have attended for more than ninety-five percent of the possible time. During the same period more than one sixth of pupils have had the equivalent of one day a week absent from school, and more than a quarter have attended for less than eighty-five per cent of the available time. Attendance is least good in Year 9 and improves slightly for the pupils in Year 11. These high levels of absence are having a serious impact on pupils' levels of attainment since teachers constantly have to repeat work which has already been covered, pupils forget what they have learnt in previous lessons, and some fail to complete important coursework that forms part of their GCSE assessments.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

20. Teaching is good in Key Stage 3, satisfactory in Key Stage 4, and good overall. This represents an improvement since the last inspection when there were instances of unsatisfactory practice in many subjects in the curriculum. The senior management team and heads of subject have invested much time and effort in the monitoring of teaching since the last inspection; their work has resulted in the observed improvement in quality.
21. In Key Stage 3, the overall quality of teaching is good in almost all subjects, including personal and social education. The only exceptions are mathematics, design and technology, and art, where teaching is satisfactory, and religious education where it is unsatisfactory. During the inspection, of the 82 lessons observed, 97 per cent were satisfactory or better, and 72 per cent were good or better. The only unsatisfactory teaching occurred in mathematics and religious education.
22. In this key stage, teachers' knowledge and understanding are good and they plan lessons well. Although most groups exhibit at least satisfactory attitudes to learning, there are some very challenging pupils. Teachers normally manage them well but there are times when their behaviour slows the pace of learning. It is to the teachers' credit that the quality of learning is good overall across the key stage, and that pupils consequently make good gains in the acquisition of skills, knowledge and understanding across most of the subjects of the curriculum.
23. In Key Stage 4, the overall quality of teaching is satisfactory, and not of such a high standard as in Key Stage 3. Teaching is satisfactory in the core subjects, English, mathematics and science. It is also satisfactory in design and technology, religious education and art. It is good in all of the other National Curriculum subjects. During the inspection, of the 57 lessons observed, 95 per cent were satisfactory or better, and 54 per cent were good or better. The only unsatisfactory teaching occurred in science and mathematics.
24. In this key stage, the strong characteristics of teaching are similar to those found at Key Stage 3. However, there are weaknesses in several subjects and the pace of learning often slows compared to Key Stage 3. The study and research skills of the majority of pupils are not being sufficiently developed, as they should be from Key Stage 3 onwards. Textbooks are often only provided in class and there are generally too few opportunities for pupils to learn independently. Hence the programme offered to the pupils does not always maximise their potential in preparation for GCSE. The study skills module in the personal and social education programme, currently taught in Year 11 is far too late, and would be much more appropriate at an earlier stage. There are also some weaknesses which are specific to certain subjects. For example, in design and technology, there is insufficient insistence on the quality of design work prior to making. Consequently, although their practical skills are average, pupils' design work is poor and GCSE results are affected.
25. Across the school as a whole, the amount of non-specialist teaching has been reduced since the previous inspection. The few teachers working outside their own specialisms receive suitable help and guidance from their colleagues and teach at least adequate lessons. As at

the time of the previous inspection, discipline is often maintained at the expense of more appropriate teaching strategies. For example, group work and pupil discussions are not often organised.

26. The school is committed, through its equal opportunities policy, to providing an inclusive education for all its pupils. Teachers have a high degree of awareness of equal opportunity issues and most department handbooks give clear guidance on how to ensure that teaching methods and organisation engage all pupils equally. Practice is effective.
27. The quality of provision for homework is variable across subjects, and is unsatisfactory in some. Although the school has a clear homework policy and it features in departmental handbooks, there has been insufficient thought given its purpose or to the cohesion of the programme across the curriculum. Consequently homework is often limited in extent and can be merely finishing off work started in class. The use of textbooks does not feature strongly in the setting of homework. Parents make the point that, for some pupils, homework is inadequate. This is clearly the case as they are not being set homework in a co-ordinated fashion in a full range of subjects. Hence, their skills in revision, reading round a topic, making notes and research are not improving sufficiently to develop them as independent learners.
28. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good. Teachers have a detailed knowledge of each pupil's needs, and work is planned to take into account the targets set in individual educational plans. Most lessons are well planned with a suitable range of teaching methods using a variety of resources. The extensive computer resources, which the learning support department has at its disposal, are well used, and pupils use the word processing skills they acquire to present their work well. The management of pupils with behavioural problems is generally good and they are rarely allowed to disrupt the learning of other pupils. Where disruption does occur it is usually because pupils are not given the opportunity to work at their own pace, making small incremental gains in learning which attract praise and recognition from teachers and which then provide the incentive to try even harder. Teachers make effective use of support staff, involving them in lesson planning and in team-teaching situations. Since the last inspection, the monitoring of pupils with special educational needs by support assistants has improved and they are now fully involved in recording the progress pupils make.

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

29. The quality and range of learning opportunities at Key Stage 3 are satisfactory overall and the statutory curriculum is in place; the curriculum has suitable breadth, balance and relevance. All the subjects of National Curriculum are taught plus religious education and personal and social education. Drama enhances the English curriculum. The school places great emphasis on the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, and gives these subjects more time in the curriculum than is found in most schools; this results in a positive impact on pupils' attainment and progress. A number of subjects, religious education, information technology, history and geography, have less time than found in most schools nationally, and there is a consequent adverse affect on pupils' progress. For subjects such as information technology and geography, some classes have a gap of two weeks between lessons and this affects continuity in learning.
30. The quality and range of learning opportunities at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory overall, and the curriculum has suitable breadth, balance and relevance. However the statutory requirement to teach religious education following the Locally Agreed Syllabus is not fully in place because too little time is allocated to teaching the subject. The Key Stage 4 curriculum reflects the high aspirations the school has for its pupils' achievements. The school ensures that almost all

pupils are entered for, and have the opportunity to gain, a broad range of nationally recognised accreditation, mainly at GCSE level. At the same time all pupils experience vocational education, and lower attaining pupils can take accreditation which matches their needs and prior attainment.

31. All pupils take English, mathematics, double award science, French, physical education, the Diploma in Vocational Education, information technology, religious education, personal, social and health education and careers. More pupils than is found nationally are entered for English literature. Pupils select three subjects from three option groups, one of which must be a design and technology subject. They choose from art, drama, history, geography, music, business studies, child care, and physical education. A Certificate of Achievement course is available for the lower attaining examination groups in French and physical education. All other courses lead to GCSE except personal, social and health education and careers. A small number of pupils take the ASDAN Youth Award as reward for improved attendance.
32. All pupils regardless of ability have equal access to the school curriculum. Where pupils are withdrawn from lessons for help with basic skills, care is taken that they do not always miss the same lessons. Both in lessons and in extra-curricular activities girls have the same opportunity to play football as the boys.
33. The school's arrangements for grouping pupils are generally satisfactory. Pupils are allocated to teaching groups on entry to the school using nationally recognised assessment data. Regular review and movement of pupils takes place to ensure correct placement. However, in science, some of the teaching groups include pupils from a wide range of prior attainment, and the work set does not always meet the needs of the highest attaining pupils. In English some of the lower sets have more boys than girls, and the teaching does not tackle the needs of the boys sufficiently. In an attempt to counteract underachievement in mathematics, the school is piloting some single sex teaching groups in Key Stage 4. The quality of the schemes of work for subjects has improved significantly since the last inspection when they were judged a serious weakness. They are now generally satisfactory, although some weaknesses remain in English and music. Through the subjects of the curriculum, the school actively promotes the development of pupils' literacy skills; the programme is well co-ordinated and effective. Effective provision is also made for the development of pupils' numeracy skills.
34. Since the last inspection, curricular opportunities for pupils with special educational needs have improved, and are now good. Pupils have full access to the National Curriculum and all statutory requirements are met. They are entered for the full range of GCSE examinations as well as the Diploma of Vocational Education.
35. The provision of extra-curricular activities is good and it has a positive impact on pupils' achievement and enthusiasm for various subjects. There is a very good range of activities in music and physical education which are taken up by a significant proportion of the pupils. The karting club is a particular strength and involves both past and present pupils. Drama, information technology and design and technology all provide good opportunities. Many subjects give extra revision classes for GCSE, and those who attend appreciate and benefit from the additional support.
36. The provision for pupils' personal and social education (PSE) is satisfactory. The school has clear and appropriate policies for sex education and drugs education. Although the lesson material provided for teachers in PSE sets out an appropriate range of activities, there are no clear learning objectives identified and the main aims of the lessons is sometimes overlooked. Some of the topics included in the Year 11 programme, such as study skills, are mistimed; it would be better if they were taught earlier.
37. The provision of careers education and guidance is satisfactory overall. It is taught from Year 9 onwards by a careers teacher, who has had specialist training, or a careers adviser. Pupils

are successfully introduced to a broad range of post 16 opportunities. However, the careers library is rather uninviting.

Links with the community and other educational establishments

38. The school acts as a focal point for its local community and, because of this, has succeeded in acquiring particularly high quality sports facilities which enhance the provision for all pupils. Many members of the public use the school as a resource during the day and into the evening and, because of the sense of ownership that this encourages, the school is generally subject to very little vandalism, thereby allowing funds to be spent on education rather than constant maintenance. During the long holidays, the school hosts both a free summer school and a literacy school, which provide pupils with enjoyable and useful activities. Members of the community act as helpful 'reading buddies' for Year 7 pupils. However, the school has few planned links with the business community, which have a direct impact on different curriculum areas.
39. Over a long period the school has maintained good partnerships with the primary schools from which most of its pupils transfer. Year 6 pupils sample lessons at Blacon during the autumn term and then attend the high school for a full day during the summer term. Throughout the year there is much liaison relating to music; some Year 6 pupils have their peripatetic tuition in the secondary school. The English and mathematics departments have developed a joint homework project. There are good arrangements for the transfer of information about individual pupils, including those with special educational needs. There is also useful liaison with colleges to which pupils transfer at sixteen, particularly with the Welsh College of Horticulture and West Cheshire College. Pupils have opportunities to visit the colleges and discuss course content, and a small number attend college on a weekly basis while still of school age. During the current year the school will welcome seventeen trainee teachers on teaching practice. Numbers are large for the size of school because the quality of the help given to the trainees is highly regarded by their colleges.

Provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

40. The school's aims and objectives strongly support all aspects of pupils' personal development but its policies lack the necessary guidance on how they may be achieved.
41. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is only satisfactory, as the legal requirements for daily collective worship are not fully met. This is largely because of inconsistencies in the way in which teachers deal with the 'thought for the day' programme which the school provides for use when there is no assembly. This was also the case at the time of the previous inspection. House and whole school assemblies provide good opportunities for spiritual, social and moral development. A good-humoured introduction to a whole school assembly on the theme of St. Valentine's Day captured pupils' interest and led them to reflect seriously on their responsibility to others. Prayer was appropriate to the theme and pupils responded with respect. Very good relationships exist with local clergy who regularly lead assemblies and are included in planning the termly programme. The laboratory location for some house assemblies is, however, inappropriate. Opportunities for spiritual development through the subjects are limited in comparison with the provision which is made for other aspects of pupils' personal development. The good potential, which exists for spiritual development in religious education, is not yet being realised. English and drama lessons use texts which allow pupils to confront the nature of evil and provide some opportunity to empathise with lifestyles very different from their own. In history, pupils investigate and reflect on the thoughts and feelings of soldiers involved in the First World War.
42. Provision for moral development is good. Teachers are good role models and there are clear expectations about behaviour, which are understood and accepted by the majority of pupils.

Assemblies deal with issues from inside and outside school; these help pupils to distinguish right from wrong and accept personal responsibility for their actions. Most subjects develop and extend pupils' personal understanding of moral issues. In geography, pupils compare the relationship between the developed and developing nations and both English and history deal with racial issues. The personal, social and health education programme effectively helps pupils to explore a range of moral issues such as substance abuse and personal relationships.

43. Provision for social development is good. Pupils are appointed to the School Council and as house representatives where they exercise real responsibility. For example, they helped to devise the home-school agreement and contributed to the creation of the school behaviour policy. A large rota of pupils provides a high standard of care for the school's animals, some of which are looked after in pupils' own homes at holiday times. Some pupils are trained to act as librarians. Year 10 pupils annually invite elderly members of the local community to a Christmas dinner and party, which has had a positive impact on local attitudes towards the school. Numerous visits out of the school and local environment broaden pupils' social experiences. Planned developments for pupils' personal and social education include aspects of citizenship. Provision for social development is made through the themes studied in some subject areas and through the opportunities for pupils to work in a variety of groups and settings. It is particularly good in music, and in physical education where pupils organise their own teams for inter-house competition, and through extensive opportunities for pupils to work together in these subjects and in extra-curricular activities.
44. Provision for pupils' cultural development is good. It is better in terms of opportunities to take part and appreciate their own cultural traditions than in the way that they are taught about the ethnic and cultural diversity of British society. Opportunities for extra-curricular activities, including sport, are good. Music is a strength. Various musical ensembles give pupils the opportunity to play a sophisticated and challenging repertoire as well as performing in local concert venues and taking part in residential trips. There is a bi-annual trip to France. The weekly drama club and regular productions make a valuable contribution to pupils' cultural development. The curriculum in English, history, geography and art contributes to pupils' knowledge and understanding of the richness found in other world cultures.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

45. The school provides its pupils with good levels of care. Staff are very committed to the pupils, treating them as individuals and making them feel valued. Pupils, parents and staff all like the system of 'family' tutor groups, comprised of pupils of different ages, in which pupils remain throughout their time in school and which allow tutors, heads of house, pupils and parents to develop good knowledge of, and trust in, each other. The school uses this knowledge well in order to tailor the support which staff offer to pupils.
46. The school is currently reviewing its arrangements for health and safety. It has recently moved rapidly to remove a considerable number of hazards. Proper procedures are being put into place quickly and carefully so that all potential risks to pupils and staff are eliminated.
47. Arrangements to ensure child protection are good, with all staff knowing what action to take should they have any concerns about a pupil; there is appropriate confidentiality, and liaison with outside agencies when necessary. The school is fortunate to have the services of a nurse who is based on site and, therefore, regularly available for advice or counselling. There are appropriate levels of supervision at lunchtime and various areas for pupils to relax in. However, as pupils and parents both mentioned, the period is very rushed, with restricted access to the serving areas. This sometimes leads to pupils being 'unfairly' marked late for afternoon registration.

48. All members of staff make great efforts to improve pupils' levels of attendance. Registers are called promptly, pupils are questioned about absence and lateness, heads of house regularly monitor pupils' attendance and letters are sent to parents as soon as any concerns emerge. The school has experienced some gaps in provision from the educational welfare service and a reduction in the amount of hours allocated to the school. In order to counteract this, governors have funded a part time post specifically devoted to improving attendance. The post holder is persistent, imaginative and enthusiastic about carrying out her duties, contacts pupils' homes on the first day of absence and maintains meticulous records, but pupils' attendance remains stubbornly low.
49. The school's positive behaviour system works well. Many staff manage pupils in a skilful manner in which authority and reason are balanced well with good relationships. Pupils are treated consistently, with good communication between staff members, which ensures that it is difficult for pupils to play one off against another. Any poor behaviour is monitored and good behaviour is rewarded with the effect that in most lessons pupils' attitudes have a positive impact on the quality of learning. All those connected with the school praise the successful way in which any hint of bullying is dealt with. The topic features prominently in Year 7 personal and social education lessons, and staff regularly remind pupils of the importance of telling adults should there be any problems. The school has successfully reintegrated pupils who have become school refusers due to bullying.
50. The family tutor group system ensures that staff monitor pupils' personal development well on an informal basis. Heads of house are fully involved in the transition arrangements for pupils moving from primary to secondary education and so have a firm basis on which to build up their knowledge of each individual. Parents and pupils both praise the effectiveness of the arrangements. Group tutors see their forms twice a day and also discuss progress on an individual basis when it comes time for the completion of records of achievement. The school is intending to extend to Key Stage 3 the more formal methods of monitoring pupils' all round development that exist in Key Stage 4. These are effective in providing pupils and staff with sufficient information in order to help guide them with decisions about what pupils should do when they leave the school.
51. Procedures for identifying pupils with special educational needs are good. Pupils are identified from their National Curriculum scores at the end of Key Stage 2, from the tests completed on entering the school in Year 7, from teacher observation and from information provided by parents and external agencies. Pupils are tested for reading on entry to the school but are not re-tested again until the end of Year 7. Although assessment and reporting procedures have improved significantly since the last inspection, there is, overall, insufficient testing and recording of basic skills as pupils move through the school. The work of the school's support assistants is of a high quality. They know the pupils well and their skilful guidance in the classroom and the careful monitoring and recording of pupils' progress provides valuable support. Whilst individual education plans exist for pupils on the special needs register, parents and pupils are not sufficiently involved when they are drawn up.
52. Since the last inspection the school has reviewed and updated its policy for assessment, recording and reporting. The arrangements for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are generally good. Teachers' marking of pupils' work has improved. Pupils know how well they are achieving in relation to national standards and what they need to do to improve. All departments ensure that pupils' effort, academic attainment and progress are assessed and recorded regularly. However, practice in recording basic skill development is insufficient. Assessments are generally reliable and accurate. A common system ensures that pupils and parents understand the grades awarded for effort and attainment in the end of year record of achievement and the half year review. Subjects use National Curriculum Levels when reporting to parents twice per year. Pupils know what criteria for assessment are used and they have the opportunity to assess themselves. The school is planning to improve the systems it uses to collate and track individual pupils' progress across subjects to help form

tutors and heads of house identify underachievement quickly.

53. Since the last inspection the school management and the departments have improved the way they use assessment information to guide curricular planning and it is now good. The school uses nationally recognised tests to assess pupils when they enter the school. This information, together with data provided by the LEA and feeder primary schools, is used to place pupils in sets based on their prior attainment. Updated assessment information provided twice each year by subjects continues to inform pupils' movement between sets as they move through Key Stage 3. The school uses the assessment information that it has gathered to set targets for the school and for pupils at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4. Each subject sets targets for achievement at GCSE. Subject teachers ensure that pupils know their targets and what action is needed in order to reach them. They monitor pupils' progress towards those targets and identify pupils who are underachieving. Such pupils receive additional mentoring from a senior member of staff.
54. The school requires subjects to analyse their examination results and to use this analysis to modify curriculum plans. Good examples of changes to curriculum plans are found in English, mathematics, science, French and history. Some subjects have not paid sufficient attention to differences in attainment arising between girls and boys and consequently insufficient action has been taken to improve the attainment of boys in English and art.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

55. Parents generally have positive views about the school; all those spoken with during the inspection week expressed support for staff and appreciation for the time that they are prepared to devote to individual pupils. Only around three-quarters of those who responded to the questionnaire consider that the school works closely with parents, although the great majority of respondents would feel comfortable about approaching staff with any problems. Inspection evidence shows that staff try hard to work with parents, regularly contacting them with praise for their children's efforts as well as when they have concerns. The school welcomes parents in to view its work and conducts occasional surveys of opinion to gauge their levels of satisfaction. However, parents' response is often weak with, for example, only around fifty percent average attendance at evenings to discuss pupils' progress. Although in the past the Parents' Association has had some dedicated members who have made big contributions to the life of the school, due to lack of support, the association is no longer active.
56. The prospectus is easily read and very welcoming to parents; however, neither it nor the governors' annual report includes all the statutorily required information. The school provides useful information for parents of those about to start in Year 7, or those choosing courses to follow in Key Stage 4, but it does not yet provide them with information about what their child will be studying in the coming term. Other than in Years 7 and 11, pupils do not have homework diaries so there is neither an easy method through which parents can keep track of what work their child should be doing at home nor for two-way communication between teachers and parents. Pupils have one short and one long written report a year. These are very variable in quality, with teachers mainly commenting on pupils' attitudes to work rather than indicating which areas they are good at and on which they need to concentrate in order to improve.
57. Most parents have signed home-school agreements and the great majority are supportive of the school in relation to their own child, attending one to one interviews or school performances if their child is taking part. A few parents are actively involved in the karting club and others help with, for instance, transporting pupils to sports events. However, despite the best efforts of the school, too few parents are sufficiently involved in their children's learning.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

58. The quality of leadership and management is a strength of the school, and has been the single most important factor in the good progress made since the last inspection. The school no longer has the serious weaknesses which were found in 1997; most have been eradicated through the energy and enthusiasm put into the management of the school's action plan, and the evaluation of progress made towards the targets within it. An example is the immense improvement made to the provision for pupils with special educational needs.
59. The leadership provided by the headteacher and deputy head is very good. They work closely together, and have been successful in communicating a clear vision of school improvement to the whole staff. Morale is good, and staff attendance is far higher than the industrial average for the country as a whole. Middle managers are successful in carrying out their responsibilities. Heads of subjects and houses have been instrumental in ensuring that improvements relating to the whole school move forward in a cohesive manner. The school's capacity for further improvement is good.
60. In response to the key issues for action from 1997, the school has produced a good long term strategic development plan, which has clearly set the agenda for improvements and identified the mechanisms to be used for their implementation. This document and the monitoring of the targets within it have been a very effective management tool. The school has identified suitable teaching and learning strategies to challenge most of the pupils, and a good start has been made in developing literacy skills across the curriculum. There is now a stable environment in which subjects can develop. Arrangements for appraisal and staff training are very good, and are helping to lift the quality of teaching. However, the management of art and religious education still need to be formalised further. Great efforts have been made to improve pupils' attendance, partly through the employment of an energetic clerk to follow up all unexplained absences, but so far it remains poor.
61. Since the last inspection, the school has developed a policy for special educational needs pupils which has regard to the Code of Practice and which meets statutory requirements. The responsibility for looking after the interests of pupils with special educational needs is shared between the head of learning support and the school's special educational needs co-ordinator. Since their appointment they have had a major impact on the quality of the school's work in this field. Together they provide a clear direction and focus for translating government legislation into workable and effective practice. With the support of the school's senior management they have tackled and overcome all of the major shortcomings identified in the last inspection.
62. The senior management team, and departmental managers monitor teaching on a very regular basis. Between them they have observed over 200 lessons in the last year, and as a direct consequence, the quality of teaching has risen since the previous inspection. Importantly, the proportion of unsatisfactory lessons has been more than halved. The quality and regularity of this monitoring has left the school well-placed to offer first class support to trainee teachers. Lessons have improved because teaching styles have been analysed carefully for effectiveness, and good practice has been shared. The school is now in a good position to switch the focus of their observations to the pupils and the amount they learn in lessons in order that the improvements may continue.
63. Governors are successful in acting as the school's 'critical friend'. Searching questions are asked of senior management and subject staff, who are frequently invited to make oral presentations to the full Governing Body. All records of meetings are in order and suitable policies are in place. However, neither the annual report to parents nor the school prospectus fully meets statutory requirements. The governors' policies are all dated but there is no formal sequential mechanism for review. Senior staff monitor several of the policies through the inspection of subject handbooks and lesson observations. However, there is no formal

programme for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of all of the policies on a regular basis. Governors clearly understand the school's strengths and weaknesses, and they set suitably challenging targets in relation to pupils' performance in GCSE examinations. Senior staff monitor these targets with great precision, inform the governors of any perceived slippage, and explain how the school will make up any shortfall. All statutory curriculum requirements are met except for arrangements for corporate worship and the provision of religious education at Key Stage 4.

64. Governors have spent a long time discussing the possible provision of a swimming pool on the site; the issue has taken up a great deal of meeting time and extra meetings have been held to discuss it further. It is clear that there has been considerable disagreement about this issue, resulting in a serious split in the Governing Body. The matter has been resolved in that a final majority decision has been made not to pursue the matter further. It is important that the governors now devote their time to ensuring that statutory requirements are met, that their policies are all adequately monitored and that the quality of education in the classroom is improved further.
65. The ethos of the school is positive: appreciated and contributed to by all involved with it. Teachers do well to improve academic standards when there are so many factors connected with the pupils' socio-economic circumstances which are difficult to overcome.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

66. The school has sufficient appropriately qualified and experienced teachers to match the needs of the National Curriculum and the abilities of the pupils. Three-quarters of the staff are graduates and the remainder all have appropriate teaching and subject qualifications. The amount of non-specialist teaching has significantly reduced since the previous inspection. Where this takes place the staff have had appropriate training and this teaching no longer has a negative impact on pupils' progress. The school has arranged training for the relatively inexperienced heads of department. Good progress has now been made in this key issue.
67. The provision of support staff for pupils with special educational needs is extremely good and these pupils receive very effective help in lessons. Technician support is now available in technology and information communication technology. These are considerable improvements since the previous inspection. The very good provision of administration and clerical staff ensures the school's smooth day-to-day operation and provides very good support for the teachers.
68. The standard of the accommodation is good and allows the curriculum to be taught effectively. It is of a very high standard in physical education, information technology and business studies. It is good in other subject areas except science, technology and art where it is mainly satisfactory. These areas have been identified for development when funds become available. Currently, the gym floor needs re-sealing and the tennis court surfaces require attention to clear the moss. The use made of the facilities by the community is very good both during the day and in the evenings. The latter has had a significant impact on reducing vandalism. The maintenance and cleanliness of the building and grounds is generally good. In both classrooms and on corridors, good displays of work help to set standards and celebrate pupils' achievements.
69. The school's spending on learning resources per pupil is high in comparison with the majority of schools nationally. As a result, the adequacy of learning resources is generally good, and these have a positive impact on teaching and progress. Most departments have sufficient textbooks to support homework and independent learning but they are infrequently used for such purposes. Deficiencies previously reported have been eradicated except in art. Provision is very good in physical education and for pupils with special educational needs. The latter is a big improvement on the position at the time of previous inspection. Presently, in music and religious education

there is a shortage of information technology equipment and some musical instruments need repair. The design and technology area lacks CAD/CAM facilities. The library now has an adequate reference section, which is supplemented by subject collections and a number of CD ROMS. It benefits from the work of a librarian and provides satisfactory support for pupils' learning, and it is well used during lunchtimes.

The efficiency of the school

70. The school has invested wisely and prudently in clearly identified priorities, such as improving literacy skills and the provision for pupils with special educational needs. In both these areas this improved provision has led to higher standards. However, not all its priorities, such as improving the provision for information technology, are so clearly identified in its development plan. This document now provides a much better basis for budget planning than it did at the previous inspection but it can be improved further in order to make it a more effective vehicle for planning. There is no clear link between departmental priorities and the school development plan, and issues such as school roll, class sizes and their financial implications would help with longer term planning.
71. The school constantly seeks to obtain maximum value from its assets. A good lettings programme not only involves the local community in the work of the school but also brings in valuable income; spending decisions are carefully considered for best value; and specific grants and additional funding are used effectively for their intended purpose. The school uses information and communication technology well to make comparisons with other schools, considers alternative solutions to meeting its intended outcomes and takes account of staff and parents' views.
72. The school receives an above average income and it provides a good all-round education. Pupils enter Year 7 with low levels of attainment. They make good progress with their learning and by the time they leave their attainment has risen in relation to their age. The school is particularly successful in meeting the needs of pupils who start with learning difficulties. It gives good value for money.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

73. To further improve the quality of education provided the governors, headteacher and staff should:
 1. Further improve attainment and GCSE results, especially at grades A*-C by:
 - Improving the standard of teaching at Key Stage 4;
 - Improving the programme of lesson monitoring to focus more on the amount of progress which pupils make;
 - Co-ordinating a programme, involving homework, which will fully develop pupils' study and independent learning skills;
 - Monitoring the development of study and independent learning skills for all pupils from Key Stage 3 onwards.

Paragraphs: 1-10, 17, 23, 24, 27, 36.
 2. Eliminate the unsatisfactory attitudes of a minority of pupils which slow progress in some classes by:
 - Improving the quality of teaching in these classes;
 - Setting attitude and behaviour targets for individual pupils, and monitoring them rigorously;
 - Involving parents in the review process;

Paragraphs; 15, 16, 22, 28.

3. Improve pupils' attendance by:

- Continuing with the current energetic programme for following up absence;
- Analysing GCSE results against pupils' previous attendance;
- Ensuring that parents understand the connection between attendance and success at GCSE;
- Ensuring that parents know the connection between pupils' attendance, the national average attendance at work, and the requirements of employers through references.

Paragraphs: 18, 19, 38, 48, 60.

In addition, the governors should consider addressing the following lesser weaknesses in their action plan:

- Improvement of attendance at parents' meetings.

Paragraphs: 55, 57.

- Improvement in the provision for religious education and the provision of a daily corporate act of worship.

Paragraphs: 21, 29, 30, 41, 63.

- Increasing the cohesion between subject and whole school development planning.

Paragraph 70.

- Ensuring that Governors' policies are all regularly revised and monitored.

Paragraphs 63, 64.

- Ensuring that statutory requirements are met in respect of the school prospectus and governors' annual report to parents.

Paragraphs: 56, 64

- Development of pupils' oral skills.

Paragraphs: 9, 25.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

The work of the special needs unit

74. The school is currently phasing out the special educational needs unit. Very few pupils have any lessons in the area previously occupied by the unit because the school follows a policy of inclusion and provides extra help in the classroom. Special needs provision was a serious weakness at the time of the previous inspection in 1997. Improvements have been made, and the quality of the provision for the pupils is now good. Most of them make good progress through the school and leave with GCSE results.
75. The work of the special needs programme has been fully reported in this report's sections on curriculum, care for pupils, quality of teaching, management, school improvement and standards.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	139
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	51

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
1%	12%	52%	31%	3%	1%	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	Y 7 – Y 11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	589	N/a
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	240	N/a

Special educational needs	Y 7 – Y 11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	42	N/a
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	108	N/a

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	0

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	28
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	35

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	85.9
National comparative data	91.0

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	3.7
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	67	56	123

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	26	25	28
	Girls	39	20	24
	Total	65	45	52
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	53	37	43
	National	63	62	55
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	7	15	8
	National	28	38	23

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	26	32	30
	Girls	41	29	27
	Total	67	61	57
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	54	50	46
	National	64	64	60
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	11	12	11
	National	31	37	28

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	44	39	83

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	8	42	43
	Girls	8	38	38
	Total	16	80	81
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	19 (23)	96 (93)	98 (95)
	National	46 (45)	91 (90)	96 (95)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	28 (28)
	National	38 (37)

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	N/a
	National	N/a

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	2
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0
White	585
Any other minority ethnic group	2

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	69	6
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	34.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.7

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	9
Total aggregate hours worked per week	232

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77%
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 2	N/a
Key Stage 3	23
Key Stage 4	24

Financial information

Financial year	1998-9
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	£
Total income	1543986
Total expenditure	1464749
Expenditure per pupil	2688
Balance brought forward from previous year	64895
Balance carried forward to next year	144132

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	589
Number of questionnaires returned	61

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	38	53	8	3	0
My child is making good progress in school.	34	49	12	3	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	29	53	14	1	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	29	34	24	13	0
The teaching is good.	34	53	3	3	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	44	39	13	3	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	64	26	8	1	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	64	29	6	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	29	46	18	6	0
The school is well led and managed.	38	49	8	1	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	43	44	8	3	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	49	38	6	1	5

Other issues raised by parents

Parents praise the arrangements for transfer from primary schools. They believe that parents' evenings are informative. Some believe that lunchtime is too rushed. They say that the arrangements for contacting parents about absence are very good. Extra-curricular provision is thought to be good.

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

ENGLISH

76. Results in English in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 were below average compared with all schools. They represent an improvement on results gained in the two previous years when they were well below the national average. In 1999 they were in line with results for schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds; they were better than mathematics but not as high as science. Boys' results are well below those achieved by girls. GCSE results for grades A* to C in English at the end of Key Stage 4 over recent years have been well below national average despite an improvement in 1999. GCSE results for grades A* to C in English Literature have similarly been well below national average. Boys' results continue to be well below those of girls nationally and in the school. However, the proportion of pupils achieving grades A* to G in 1999 were above average compared with all schools, an improvement over recent years.
77. Work seen in lessons and in exercise books and folders shows that basic literacy skills are weak. Inspection judgements show that standards are below average at the end of Key Stage 3 and well below average at the end of Key Stage 4. In Key Stage 3, pupils of all attainment levels are not reluctant to write lengthy pieces of prose, and most write across a range of styles. They learn to improve their literacy skills through preparation of drafts and second versions of their work. Reading levels are generally low, though high attaining pupils read with expression and confidence. A special programme of reading assistance helps low attaining pupils to read books in class and understand the basic features of literary texts. In Key Stage 4, weaknesses in literacy continue, though consistent practice through redrafting and use of word-processors enables lower attaining pupils to produce work of appropriate standard to obtain a GCSE grade. Higher attaining pupils write thoughtful, carefully prepared essays. Reading for accuracy and understanding is variable but sufficient to enable all pupils to learn from traditional English literature texts, such as Shakespeare's *Othello*, as well as texts from other cultures. Few pupils, however, read fiction for personal pleasure. Higher attaining pupils speak to the point when asked, and nearly all pupils speak in class only in response to questions from the teacher. In both key stages the limited range of opportunities for pupils of all attainment levels to speak in class restricts their oral fluency. Most pupils are good listeners.
78. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is well below average. An intensive programme in Key Stage 3 to improve literacy skills is helping low attaining pupils to cope with reading and writing in lessons. This programme builds effectively on work the pupils have done in their primary schools. In English, further attention to the accuracy of their writing is raising achievement in lessons. As a result, lower attaining pupils are making good progress, as was seen in their work in lessons and in the rising results in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3. Pupils make good progress overall in Key Stage 3, and satisfactory progress in Key Stage 4; they could, however, be further challenged intellectually in both key stages. Literacy skills are consolidated in thorough preparation for GCSE, and regular use of information technology to enhance the standard of presentation of coursework encourages pupils to check the accuracy of their writing. Because of the intensive and effective attention given to their learning, pupils with special educational needs make good progress in both key stages, as was shown when all pupils with special educational needs gained a GCSE grade in English in 1999.
79. Key Stage 3 pupils generally enjoy their English lessons and work hard, a key to the good rates of progress made overall. In Key Stage 4, pupils' absence sometimes makes it difficult for English teachers to ensure continuity in the learning. In both key stages, pupils are co-operative in lessons with their teachers and with each other. This willingness to work is not used enough in English to develop pupils' thinking through speaking, a factor in Key Stage

4 that prevents boys in particular from making faster progress.

80. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed in English, a marked improvement on its quality in the previous report. Teaching was good in all lessons observed in Key Stage 3. It is characterised by energy and determination directed at pupils of all levels of attainment. Effective planning makes good use the hour-long lessons, gets them off to a brisk start, challenges the pupils to recall previous work, introduces new ideas and demands regular practice of reading and writing skills. No time is wasted in English lessons. A low set in Year 7 thrived because of the intensity of learning expected of them. They stumbled over words without embarrassment when reading a lively play as part of the reading enrichment scheme in English. In Year 8, a good use of overhead projector and tape-recorder took lower attaining pupils through a variety of learning methods to gain real understanding of structure in poetry. A Year 9 lesson with a low set generated a buzz of excitement when a brisk question and answer session gave them an opportunity to show their knowledge of how characters in *Twelfth Night* respond to each other. Their use of technical terms, such as 'dramatic irony' and 'monologue', was impressive because understanding was genuine and not recalled by rote. Teaching in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory overall; in nearly half the lessons observed it was good. Well-planned and well-paced lessons give pupils sound preparation for the two GCSE courses in English. Appropriate assignments are set and pupils are effectively helped to meet basic course requirements. Teachers use their subject expertise to guide pupils through the courses. However, they make pupils too reliant on them, directing their thinking, when observation shows that they can be allowed more often to think for themselves. This lack of independence as learners is a key factor in the lower attainment of boys in relation to the girls that continues since the previous report. Marking in both key stages is regular and helpful, pointing out where improvements are to be made. The target-sheets and self-assessment exercises help to focus pupils' attention on their work. Worthwhile homework integrates well with classwork.
81. The rate of improvement in English since the previous report is good. The major change, apart from the improvement in teaching, is the adoption of aspects of the National Literacy Strategy to boost command of basic skills in Key Stage 3. All pupils in lessons showed reasonably positive attitudes and good levels of concentration to allow learning to take place. The worn out texts reported in 1997 have been replaced. Some matters remain to be improved, however. There is still some superficial redrafting of work, especially in Key Stage 4. Though school managers monitor teaching for quality, strengths are not shared in lessons nor is the *en suite* accommodation for the subject fully exploited to raise standards further. The scheme of work needs to be improved. However, good leadership, teamwork and commitment have effectively prioritised the tasks facing English since the previous report. A combination of better results gained in external examinations in 1999 and inspection evidence shows that standards are rising. The good teaching, pupils' positive attitudes in lessons and the effective programme to improve basic skills are steadily raising achievement.

Drama

82. Standards in drama in Key Stage 3 are average but improving. Some pupils find drama skills difficult to understand. They do not believe fully in their work when creating and presenting drama. Teaching is good because of subject expertise that plans well, is challenging and is establishing skills required to ensure progress, without spoiling pupils' enjoyment of the lessons. Results in GCSE drama in 1997 and 1998 were well below average compared with all schools, though no pupils were entered for the examination in 1999. Attainment in lessons in Key Stage 4 shows that standards are improving rapidly. This is because of very good teaching that matches precisely the needs of the pupils to the requirements of the course. As an extra-curricular activity, drama makes a valuable contribution to the life of the school.

Key skills – literacy

83. The school tackles the low levels of literacy at the beginning of Key Stage 3 with an effective approach that is beginning to raise standards. It has adopted aspects of the National Literacy Intervention Strategy, providing teaching specific to those pupils who have problems with reading and writing. In parallel with this programme, all subjects assist in pupils' acquisition of basic skills. Inspection evidence shows that in some subjects, for example English, history, geography, modern foreign languages, pupils prepare extended pieces of writing. Literacy across subjects is well co-ordinated, and almost all subject teachers show a good understanding of how language in their subject can be made understandable, and the spelling of technical terms improved. Good examples of subject teachers' awareness and pupils' improved literacy skills were seen in poetry in geography. Aspects of role-play occur in history and science. Pupils are encouraged to read aloud in design technology, information technology and history. The fact that pupils ask to read aloud, regardless of their ability, is a good sign that they wish to improve. Because of access to the school's Intranet, the library and its CD-ROMs, some pupils read for information in lessons and during breaks. Opportunities to speak in lessons are generally restricted to answering teachers' questions. Discussion in class, rather than answering teachers' questions about facts, is rare. Pupils are not yet encouraged to exchange ideas and defend them from each other, though a good example occurred in a history lesson, when formal debate in Year 8 reviewed the Lord Mayor's role in the Great Fire of 1666.

MATHEMATICS

84. On entry to the school, pupils' attainment in mathematics is well below average. In 1999, the pupils' results in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 were well below the national average in comparison to all schools but results have improved since 1997. When compared to schools taking pupils from similar backgrounds, the results were above average in 1998 but dipped to below average in 1999. The school attributes this to changes in staffing at a critical time in the pupils' mathematical education. In the GCSE examinations, attainment at grades A* - C was well below the national average; there has been little variation in this over the past three years. The pupils' performance in mathematics was not as high as that in English and science but it mirrors the pattern of the cohort's results in national tests at the end of Key Stage 3. Almost without exception, pupils are entered for GCSE examinations in mathematics. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A* - G in 1999 was above the national average and is steadily improving. In addition, in 1999, a small number of pupils in Year 10 were entered for GCSE examinations. All were successful in achieving grades C and above. Overall, girls achieve slightly better than boys as is found nationally.
85. Evidence from the inspection, including observation of lessons, scrutiny of work and discussion with pupils indicates that, overall, standards of work at the end of both key stages are below those expected of pupils of similar age. There are exceptions however. The highest-attaining pupils are more highly motivated and their standard of work is sometimes above average. Since the previous inspection more investigational work has been incorporated into the curriculum. This focuses pupils' attention on clarity of thought, prediction of outcomes, and the testing of theories. The more able pupils write up their accounts logically and in sequence, often finding an algebraic equation to fit a generalised solution. Other pupils explain their ideas satisfactorily but find it more difficult to express them in writing using mathematical terminology. Information technology is being used effectively to interrogate mathematical data and display it for visual impact.
86. Pupils are grouped by ability for mathematics. Overall, they make satisfactory progress throughout the school but the continuity and pace of learning varies across the groups, mainly affected by staffing changes outside the school's control. Higher attaining pupils

achieve better in relation to earlier attainment because teaching is more acutely focused to their needs. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well in Year 9 upwards in relation to the targets set for them in individual education plans. The lowest attaining pupils in Year 9 upwards, including those with the greatest learning difficulties, achieve well in relation to their starting points because teaching is specifically targeted on their individual needs. In Years 7 and 8, pupils in this ability range do not achieve as well because neither the resources nor the teaching strategies are sufficiently well matched to the specific learning needs of pupils in these groups.

87. Pupils are generally well behaved. This contributes to a positive learning environment in most classes and, ultimately, to constructive learning and practice. There are occasional exceptions when the behaviour of a small minority of pupils affects the progress of others. Pupils in the higher attaining groups respond well to challenge. Their willingness to work independently, in their own time, to prepare for higher level tests at Key Stage 3, or GCSE examinations in Year 10, shows a high level of commitment. These pupils gain in confidence and self-esteem. In contrast, pupils in the middle ability range tend to have lower aspirations and are less well motivated. This is reflected in the variable quality of written work; also in the pupils' disinclination to bring basic equipment, such as pencils and rulers, to lessons. Both factors are detrimental to progress. Homework is set regularly to complement classwork. At best it is used well, either to consolidate knowledge through application or to lead to subsequent work. A minority of pupils do not produce homework on time.
88. Teaching is satisfactory overall in both key stages. In the lessons observed in Key Stage 3, approximately four-fifths were satisfactory or better. In half the lessons teaching was good. The 'team teaching' in Year 9, involving two teachers, is particularly effective. It allows pupils to make good gains in learning, enhancing existing knowledge and extending mathematical skills. At Key Stage 4, almost all the teaching was satisfactory or better and just under three quarters was good. Lesson planning is generally good, especially when the objectives and achievements are shared with the pupils. In one very good lesson with the top set in Year 9, in which a fast pace was maintained, the pupils were successful in tackling complex mental arithmetic questions as well as making critical self-evaluations of their most recent piece of investigative work. Where teaching was unsatisfactory, there was an imbalance between recapitulation and progression. As a result the work was repetitive and the pace of learning slowed. Some pupils then lost interest or resorted to more challenging behaviour. Another weakness, evident in a few lessons, was the lack of sufficiently well graded exercises to sustain pupils' attention throughout the whole lesson. This led to lack of motivation and relatively little progression in learning for some pupils.
89. New teaching strategies have been introduced since the previous inspection. These are effective. Good procedures for monitoring teaching and assessing pupils' progress are also having a positive impact on learning. The use of these well organised systems is particularly pertinent in the light of fairly frequent changes in staffing. Currently there is an enthusiastic team spirit amongst the staff and newly qualified teachers are receiving good developmental support. Teachers share a common goal, to raise standards of achievement. The department is innovative. New initiatives, such as team teaching and single-sex classes in some ability groups, are contributing to rising standards of work. There is good capacity for further improvement.

Key skills – numeracy

90. Pupils' basic numeracy skills are well below average on entry to the school. When applying computational skills to other aspects of mathematics the response is often slow and there is an obvious lack of mental agility. All too often pupils rely on calculators to carry out operations they should be able to do mentally. This particularly affects the work of the middle and lower-attaining pupils, especially in Key Stage 4. Numerical skills are improving

in Key Stage 3 where a structured approach to the teaching of numeracy is beginning to have an impact. This is supported by the recent introduction of a thoughtfully planned whole-school numeracy policy. Co-operation between subject departments is resulting in greater awareness of mathematical concepts and appropriate skills being taught at relevant times.

SCIENCE

91. Standards of attainment in science are clearly rising, particularly in Key Stage 3. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests, results were below the national average for all schools. However, they were well above average compared to schools taking their pupils from similar backgrounds. Boys and girls achieve broadly similar results at this stage and results showed an improvement in 1999 compared with 1998 and 1997. Results in science are better than in English and mathematics. In 1999, the proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C at GCSE was well below the national average. The proportion of the year group achieving a graded result was, however, above the national average. This was a considerable achievement because several of the candidates had special educational needs. The 1999 GCSE A*-C grades were below the proportions gained in 1998 and 1997, but results were in line with the school's predictions and the variance of attainment on entry. The performance of girls and boys in GCSE examinations is broadly similar.
92. In work seen in lessons and a scrutiny of exercise books, attainment at the end of both key stages is below average for age. This represents a somewhat higher standard in age related terms than pupils' attainment on entry to the school. There is, however, more evidence of attainment at well below average levels amongst pupils at Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3. As in tests and examinations, no significant difference in the attainment of girls and boys is found in work in class. Contributions to attainment in literacy are good with a high insistence on the use of correct scientific language in lessons, where spelling, context and meaning are taught, tested and monitored. By the end of the key stage, the higher attaining pupils have a good grasp of topics such as respiration and the operation of muscles at Level 6 of the National Curriculum, and they produce neat and extensive records of work. Pupils in lower sets are able to access work at a similar level but they do not gain a complete understanding of the topics. Hence when they are tested on them there are evident gaps in knowledge. Lower attaining pupils know the characteristics of life when prompted with initial letters, they have some difficulties in pronouncing longer scientific terms such as nutrition and respiration, but they know about the relationship between oxygen, carbon dioxide and breathing.
93. In revision lessons at the end of Key Stage 4, good use is made of the Internet. Higher attaining pupils can use many scientific terms to discuss and label a diagram of the human eye, they understand the operation of both ciliary and extrinsic eye muscles and can explain image formation on the retina, and its transmission to the brain via the optic nerve. These pupils can explain their strategies for improving their grades in tests. Average attaining pupils can work through a computerised revision programme in chemistry and obtain immediate feedback on their progress, which they welcome as they try to improve their scores. In attempting to answer questions on atoms, ions and bonds, they are able to note their areas of difficulty and bring them to a collaborative discussion session to explore and increase their level of understanding.
94. The achievements of pupils are generally good, given the low starting points on entry to the school. Pupils are making good progress in learning at Key Stage 3; there is a small amount of very good progress and a very small amount of unsatisfactory progress in lessons. Overall, progress in lessons at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory with a very small amount being less than satisfactory. The intermittent absence of some pupils, often at critical times in the course, means that progress often slows compared with Key Stage 3. Very good class

management often produces long periods of sustained concentration. As pupils prepare for modular tests, using computers to check understanding, they can work through a past GCSE paper and identify areas for further learning and consolidation. GCSE targets set by the school are being met. Pupils only make unsatisfactory progress in the small number of lessons where there is a lack of enthusiasm and immature behaviour prevails. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress towards the targets in their individual education plans and make the same progress in science as the rest of the class. This is achieved by the provision of work specially designed to meet the needs of all pupils, and the assistance of very well briefed learning support staff.

95. The overall response of pupils in both key stages is good, with some being very good and only a very small proportion being unsatisfactory. Good behaviour normally prevails in lessons, with pupils showing a good level of respect for the views of others. There is little confrontation and often there is a good buzz of industrious collaborative working. In a Year 9 lesson, which opened with undesirable undercurrents, pupils were very quickly firmly and fairly dealt with so that learning went ahead.
96. Teaching in Key Stage 3 is good and in Key Stage 4 it is satisfactory. Almost a quarter of teaching in Key Stage 3 is very good but there is a small amount of unsatisfactory teaching in Key Stage 4. Where teaching is of a high standard, class management skills are of a high order, with good pace and timing, and very good use of voice and body language. Teachers have high expectations and often use a variety of approaches. There is very good use of a positive behaviour strategy in all lessons, and pupils value the praise and reward system. The department has put a high priority on developing relationships between pupils and teachers. This has encouraged a positive response from pupils who openly value the revision programmes and target setting. Science staff have set out to make the subject enjoyable and have had a large measure of success. Teachers' lesson planning is good and detailed; it takes into account assessment, and targets for work are clearly set out in printed form in pupils' books. As a result, pupils, teachers and parents can chart progress. The good teaching generates good rates of pupils' learning in lessons. Firm but fair class management helps pupils to concentrate well. There is a good use of both class and demonstration practical work. Weaknesses in some lessons relate to topics being too extensive, insufficiently clear instructions, lack of text books and a lack of illustrative material to enhance understanding.
97. The department is well led and managed. There has been much improvement since the last inspection, including an extended development plan, new teaching strategies, increased use of practical investigations and better matching of work to the attainment levels of the pupils. All this has had a positive impact on pupils' learning. Assessment is used well in the department, and is carried out in meticulous detail. It includes pupils' self-evaluation against targets and is used to inform teachers' planning at all levels. Work in books is well marked in a style proving helpful to pupils in making improvement; there is good celebration of pupils' work. The curriculum meets statutory requirements with good continuity across the key stages. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching quality is now carried out to a high standard, and has had an impact on the improvement in quality since the last report.

ART

98. Since the last inspection, GCSE results for grades A*-C have declined from being below the national average in 1997, when compared with all schools, to being well below in 1999. The numbers of pupils gaining an A*-G pass are also below the national average. Pupils' achievements in art are two-thirds of a grade lower than in other examination subjects. Although a new art teacher was appointed to a permanent post two years ago, pupils at Key Stage 4 are still suffering from a legacy of many supply teachers in the years preceding this appointment. Over half of the 1999 entry were poor attenders and this depressed their

attainment. No teacher assessments are currently undertaken at the end of Key Stage 3.

99. Attainment in lessons, and as seen in pupils' portfolios and display work, is below average for pupils at the end of Key Stage 3. However, there is evidence from the work of pupils in Years 7 and 8 that current teaching strategies are starting to raise standards. Attainment of pupils in Year 11, at the end of Key Stage 4, is well below the national average. This reflects the recent trend in GCSE examination results. At the start of Year 7, pupils have, for example, a secure theoretical knowledge and understanding concerning colour. However, their practical artwork skills and techniques are underdeveloped. Pupils can mix colours successfully but their brushwork skills and ability to apply paint to paper in a controlled manner is below average. Across both key stages, pupils are more secure with drawing than colour work. However, mark making and tonal and textural techniques are variable and generally below expectations. Composition and perspective work are also below average at both key stages. At Key Stage 4 in particular, pupils are insecure with direct observational work and tend to rely too heavily on copying secondary source material. Pupils' creative and imaginative skills, background knowledge of major artists and movements and their ability to criticise and analyse their own and the work of others are all underdeveloped.
100. Whilst the quality of learning and progress of all pupils, including those with special educational needs, is mainly satisfactory at Key Stage 3 it is unsatisfactory at Key Stage 4. In a Year 7 lesson, for example, there was sound reinforcement of printing work skills placed in a new context of exploring symbolic patterns in Aboriginal art. Pupils were enjoying the learning experience and achieving success in their final pieces. However, later on the in key stage, and into Key Stage 4, pupils' sketchbook work and background preparation is minimal. In discussion, the pupils themselves admit this, in spite of the teaching properly emphasising the importance of development and image research work.
101. Attitudes and behaviour at Key Stage 3 are mainly satisfactory. Whilst behaviour is satisfactory at Key Stage 4, pupils' attitudes are mainly unsatisfactory. Overall, at both key stages, there is a positive approach to practical artwork. However, at Key Stage 4, pupils are unwilling to take artistic risks. They make easy choices and their work consequently lacks depth as well as breadth. With a few exceptions, pupils are not sufficiently prepared to make the commitment required to achieve higher grade GCSE passes.
102. Teaching at Key Stages 3 and 4 is always at least satisfactory and sometimes good. In this, standards have been maintained since the last inspection. A strength of the teaching is its commitment to develop effective working relationships with pupils enabling a positive ethos for learning which is focused on improving their attitudes towards the subject. There is a sound emphasis on individual tutorial work at both key stages. Assessment of work during lessons is good. Teachers show good, professional knowledge and understanding of the subject. To further improve the teaching, there is a need to identify and deal with common, key skills problems which pupils face as a class rather than on an individual basis.
103. The department is well organised and managed on a day to day basis. Since the last inspection a scheme of work has been put in place. This now needs to be audited against the National Curriculum programmes of study in order to check for breadth, balance and relevance. Although there have been some improvements to the art accommodation since the last inspection, there are serious problems of lighting with a lack of natural light due to opaque or frosted plastic windows. Sketchbooks are not of sufficiently good size and quality and there are insufficient materials for the development of three-dimensional and textile work. The department has no computer equipment and cannot make its required contribution to pupils' information technology education. Library and other reference material need further development in relation to art from other than Western European cultures. Information technology and other reference material require improvement if pupils are to properly develop independent learning skills.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

104. Teacher assessments in 1999 show a marked improvement from the standards achieved at the end of Key Stage 3 compared with 1998 and 1997 but are still well below the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A* to C in GCSE examinations was well below average in both 1998 and 1999 but the proportion of pupils achieving grades A to G was average. As the school entered a much higher proportion of pupils in this subject than the national average, pupils' achievements are slightly better than national comparisons suggest. Whilst girls achieved better results than boys, the difference is less marked than occurs nationally. GCSE results in design and technology are similar to those of other subjects in the school.
105. Overall, pupils' attainment is well below the national average by the end of Key Stage 3. Standards of making are better than standards of designing. The overall quality of finished products in resistant materials, food and textiles is average. However, pupils are only able to design in a limited manner, concentrating mostly on designing the appearance of a pre-determined product, rather than on any functional or technical aspects. There have been some recent improvements in pupils' standards of drawing, with improved use of colour since the previous inspection, but they are still weak. Pupils are able to experiment and evaluate in food and textiles. Their ability to use control technology is very limited. Overall, pupils' attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is well below average. As in the previous key stage the standards of making are better than of designing. Some pupils make products that are of a high standard of accuracy and finish. There are better examples of experimentation in food and textiles than in resistant materials. Designing is weak and follows a formula rather than there being much evidence of pupils becoming interested in solving problems. Drawing is mostly of a low quality. Insufficient use is made of information technology for analysis or presentation and the only evidence of the use of CAD/CAM is a programmable sewing machine. Pupils are able to use a computer program for nutritional analysis. Apart from the improvements in graphics most of the weaknesses in attainment are the same as reported at the previous inspection.
106. Overall, pupils' achievement is satisfactory at both key stages; however, this balances the good progress in acquiring making skills with unsatisfactory progress in designing and drawing. This is mainly because of a focus on acquiring craft skills in the planning of the curriculum. Pupils with special educational needs mostly make good progress because of structured project work; however, the limited emphasis on decision-making when designing results in most higher attaining pupils making unsatisfactory progress. Pupils make similar progress in each of the areas of resistant materials, food and textiles.
107. Pupils behave well during Key Stage 3. They are keen to learn and try to achieve high standards. They are interested in experimenting and drawing conclusions when given the opportunity. However, standards of presentation of written work and drawing are very variable. Whilst many pupils enjoy the practical work at Key Stage 4, many do not get involved in designing because it is often presented as an examination routine rather than as a vital part of creating a quality product. Hence they become bored with some lessons and achieve less than they could.
108. Teaching is satisfactory at both key stages because lessons are always thoroughly prepared and well organised; teachers have good technical knowledge and provide thorough individual help. Relationships between teachers and pupils are mostly good. In some lessons teachers convey enthusiasm to pupils. There is good provision for pupils to continue with their work outside lesson times. No lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory and over one third were good, which is an improvement on the previous inspection when some lessons were judged to be unsatisfactory. However, some teachers have a more limited knowledge of designing and graphics than of making. Hence they use the GCSE mark scheme as a strategy for teaching designing, rather than exciting the pupils with the

challenge of producing imaginative products even if this, for instance, means developing an idea three-dimensionally rather than on paper.

109. The department is well organised. A good scheme of assessment involving moderation against a portfolio of work has been put in place for the end of Key Stage 3 since the previous inspection. However pupils' achievement is affected in designing and making by allocation of periods of time to each material area without planning the curriculum as a whole to ensure a progressive development of common skills. The result is a focus on making skills leading to the imbalance between progress in designing and making. Lack of appropriate equipment for teaching control technology and very limited computer provision, including CAD/CAM, has led to weaknesses in these areas particularly in GCSE project work. The accommodation for work in resistant materials, whilst plentiful, is out of date and is an inappropriate environment for developing design skills.

GEOGRAPHY

110. Standards of attainment have improved since the previous inspection. In 1999 the teachers' assessments of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 were well below the national average. In the 1999 GCSE examination the proportion of A* to C grades was well below the national average but it was above average compared with pupils' attainment in other subjects taken at the same time. In terms of A* to G grades, the results were in line with the national average. Girls' results were higher than boys' results in line with the national trend.
111. Overall attainment in class is well below average for age at the ends of both key stages. At the end of Key Stage 3, pupils in the highest sets draw accurate climate graphs and interpret these in relation to temperature and rainfall patterns. Pupils in the middle and lower sets read graphs in texts and with help predict, for example, the growth of tourism. The department has a clear focus on developing pupils' literacy skills, which has yet to fully affect pupils' written standards. By the end of Key Stage 4, higher attaining pupils, with the help of good annotated diagrams, describe and explain the formation of the physical features of glacial landscapes. Average and lower attaining pupils can describe the shape of a glaciated valley but find its formation difficult to explain.
112. Pupils' achievements in relation to their prior attainment are generally satisfactory. This generalisation masks a more complicated picture. The quality of learning in class is generally good but there are factors which reduce pupils' progress made over time. In Key Stage 3, whilst pupils in the higher sets make good progress, that of the pupils in the middle and lower sets is inconsistent. The reasons for this are insufficient curriculum time, weak retention of knowledge and understanding by a significant proportion of pupils and poor presentation of work. Unsatisfactory behaviour and attitudes in Year 9 also act as a brake on progress in some classes. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. At Key Stage 4 the current targets of the majority of pupils taking geography are higher than their prior attainment indicates. They are making good progress towards achieving these. However, answers to GCSE questions still lack specific description and explanations are too short and vague. Although there is a focus on key words in each unit of work, pupils do not build a systematic geographical vocabulary to consolidate their learning.
113. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour at both key stages are satisfactory overall. Some unsatisfactory behaviour was seen in a Year 9 lesson on tourism in the last lesson of the day, which had a negative impact on their learning. In the lowest set in Year 7 the immature behaviour and poor social skills of the pupils caused their progress to be only satisfactory in response to good teaching. The presentation of work is poor in the middle and lower sets

and this lack of pride has a detrimental effect on learning. Pupils generally have little opportunity take responsibility for their own learning outside fieldwork. However, there is some good extended writing, for example, in Year 8 a script recording an interview with a hill farmer.

114. The quality of teaching is never less than satisfactory and the majority is good. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. At Key Stage 3 it is good or better in four fifths of lessons and at Key Stage 4 it is consistently good. This good teaching has a positive impact on learning and attainment. The teaching demonstrates a clear understanding of subject matter. Lessons are well planned and prepared, and clear objectives are communicated to the pupils. In the best lessons, for example, on the causes and prevention of flooding and glaciation, teachers had high expectations and challenged pupils throughout. Teaching was least effective in ensuring learning where, of necessity, teachers had to spend too much time managing pupils due to their unsatisfactory behaviour. Where homework is set it extends learning. Fieldwork skills are developed in each year and this is an improvement since the previous inspection. The department makes a useful contribution to the development of numeracy but the use of information communication technology is limited.
115. The department is effectively led and managed. Scope exists to slim down the scheme of work at Key Stage 3 and to extend the depth of most topics to improve attainment. This is essential as the time given to the subject is well below average. This is a major factor, which impinges on pupils' progress and attainment at Key Stage 3.

HISTORY

116. Teachers' assessments of pupils' attainments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 indicate that the proportion of pupils reaching expected standards was well below average. It was below average in 1998 and well below average in 1997. The trend over three years is, nevertheless, slowly improving. The proportion of pupils achieving A*-C grades in the GCSE examination between 1997 and 1999 is well below average. However, the average grade achieved has risen considerably. There is no significant difference in the attainments of boys and girls.
117. The overall attainment of pupils who are currently near the end of Key Stage 3 has risen since the last inspection but it is still below average. However, standards are rising. Evidence from lesson observations and samples of pupils' work shows that writing skills have improved. A minority of pupils achieve high standards. They can gain information from a range of historical sources and reach conclusions which they support with appropriate evidence. Their work is well structured and written at length. Most pupils successfully infer information from sources, but their skills of analysis are weak. The work of a significant minority of pupils is well below average. They seldom go beyond describing the content of sources or making simple comparisons between the past and the present day. Most pupils' understanding of historical interpretations is underdeveloped. By the end of Key Stage 4, the attainment of the relatively small number of pupils who choose to follow the GCSE course is now above average; this is a considerable improvement on standards achieved previously. They handle sources of evidence with confidence, and select information appropriately in conducting investigations for coursework. Some pupils show considerable maturity in their analysis of information and in the way in which their ideas are expressed.
118. Although current pupils' overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is below average, it is better than it was in 1999. Achievement is good because pupils have made good progress from a low starting point. In Key Stage 4, pupils are reaching levels of attainment, which are higher than would be expected on the basis of their previous work. This is largely due to good teaching which has emphasised literacy skills, and pupils' positive attitudes to

learning. Pupils who have special educational needs make good progress in Key Stage 3 because the work is well matched to their needs and because of the effective support from classroom assistants. In Key Stage 4, their educational plans are based on the skills needed in history.

119. In both key stages, pupils' attitudes to work are good. A minority of pupils, mostly boys, in the lower sets in Key Stage 3, find concentration difficult and their behaviour can start to be disruptive. However, they usually respond well to redirection or help from the teacher or classroom assistants. An atmosphere of industry prevails in most lessons. Pupils are keen to answer questions and share their knowledge. Relationships between pupils and teachers are good.
120. The overall quality of teaching is good and the proportion of good teaching has increased since the previous inspection. In Key Stage 3, teaching is never less than satisfactory and is mostly good. In approximately a quarter of lessons it is very good. It is consistently good in Key Stage 4. As a consequence, pupils learn well and make good progress. Teachers use their subject knowledge well in questioning pupils about their work. Lesson objectives are made clear, and are related to previous learning. Activities are well matched to pupils' attainment levels and provide a suitable challenge. Most lessons make a good contribution to the development of pupils' literacy skills. The teacher uses subject knowledge effectively in sharp questioning which ensures that Year 11 pupils work at pace in revising for GCSE. There is thorough attention to examination technique. Teachers make good use of quality resources. Some of these are supported by commercially produced worksheets which are adapted to meet the needs of lower attaining pupils and those who have special educational needs. In lower sets particularly, activities are varied to ensure that interest and concentration can be sustained. The pupils appreciate and are well motivated by the way the teachers recognise and record their contributions to lessons. Non specialist teachers in Key Stage 3, however, lack precise understanding of relationship between National Curriculum Levels and the key elements of historical skills. Homework, however, is often little more than finishing off work started in class. Quicker workers, therefore, have little to do.
121. Subject leadership and management have improved since the previous inspection and are now satisfactory. Leadership has created a positive ethos for the subject and there is a good culture for curriculum development although the development plan lacks detail. Schemes of work and good assessment procedures and are now in place. Assessment information is analysed and used effectively in Key Stage 4. The time made available for the subject in Key Stage 3 has increased since the previous inspection but is still insufficient. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection and the department is well placed to continue to improve.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

122. Teacher assessments in 1999 and 1998 show an improvement in the standards achieved at the end of Key Stage 3 compared with 1997 but are below the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A* to C in GCSE examinations was well below the national average in 1999. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A* to G in 1999 was also well below average. The proportion of pupils entered for information studies was small in 1999 and half that of the previous two years. Girls achieve at a similar level to boys. In 1999, GCSE results in information studies were lower than results for other subjects in the school.
123. Overall by the end of Key Stage 3 pupils' attainment is below average. The standards of work observed in lessons and in pupils' files at Key Stage 3 show improving standards. Pupils' competence in using basic software is average. Most pupils are able to produce well

laid out documents involving text and graphics. They are able to create and use databases and spreadsheets to organise and present information and can carry out basic programming with LOGO. Pupils are able to use these basic skills in several subjects, for instance presenting work in English and history and making use of spreadsheets, databases and LOGO in mathematics. Pupils carry out nutritional analysis in their food technology lessons. The use of computers is particularly strong in French where pupils make good use of software written by the teacher. However, their ability to select the means to carry out tasks and to design communications for a specific audience is under-developed. Their use of computers for measurement and control is weak as in the previous inspection. Overall standards are well below average at the end of Key Stage 4. During the key stage all pupils follow a discrete course in information technology in which most reinforce their basic skills but do not extend them substantially. Increasing numbers of pupils are choosing to study for a GCSE in information studies. The work of these pupils observed in lessons and their coursework folders indicate that standards are rising and the proportion of pupils now producing work of grade C standard or better is higher than in 1999. Presentation of most project work is good.

124. Overall pupils' achievement is good during Key Stage 3 because the emphasis on basic skills is appropriate for most pupils and these are well taught. However there is insufficient challenge in lessons to enable higher attaining pupils to develop the higher level skills of selection and to address specific audiences. The strong emphasis on developing pupils' basic competence ensures that pupils with special educational needs make good progress. During Key Stage 4, pupils' achievement is satisfactory. All pupils reinforce their information technology skills in the discrete course and those pupils with special educational needs make good progress because patient teaching encourages them to develop basic skills with office software. However, lack of facilities to develop the use of computers for control and measurement, limits overall progress. Progress during Key Stage 3 and in the discrete course in Key Stage 4 is limited by the lack of continuity resulting from pupils having only one lesson per fortnight. This particularly limits the opportunities for pupils to progress beyond the basic skills in the Key Stage 4 discrete course. Pupils studying for GCSE make at least satisfactory progress. In these classes higher attaining pupils are able to make good progress because the teacher supports them in a more independent approach than at Key Stage 3. The need for pupils to share computers in some classes also limits the progress of some pupils in both key stages.
125. Pupils' response is good at both key stages although in a small number of classes attendance is poor. They behave well in most information technology lessons and try to produce good work. Most are keen to answer questions and respond well to individual advice. When it is necessary to share computers they do so responsibly. The generally positive attitudes, including good attendance at a computer club, are a significant factor in pupils' improving achievement.
126. Overall, teaching is good at both key stages and better than at the previous inspection when one third of teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory. Teaching was good or very good in half of the lessons observed and no lessons were unsatisfactory. In the best lessons teaching is enthusiastic and there are high expectations of pupils. Lessons are well planned and always include clear objectives and a summary to test pupils' learning. Teachers' subject knowledge is good but non-specialists teach some of the lessons at Key Stage 3. Whilst these lessons are satisfactory, a reduction in the number of teachers used would ensure that the contribution of non-specialists would be more consistent. Teaching at Key Stage 3 sometimes needs to relate more accurately to the different levels of pupils' attainment. Whilst the teachers give good oral help, marking needs to include more written advice on how pupils can improve. Homework is often rather limited.
127. The current subject leader has only been in post since September and has made a good start on raising standards, and the profile of the subject. There have been several initiatives

to raise standards including establishing a cross-curricular working party, revising schemes of work, introducing basic qualifications at Key Stage 4 and making contacts with the examination moderator and schools with successful ICT departments. The number and quality of computers is good and a part-time technician maintains the system. All these initiatives are beginning to have a positive effect. The lack of appropriate hardware and software is the main reason for the poor standards in the use of computers for control.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES (FRENCH)

128. Key Stage 3 teacher assessments for French in 1999 were above average compared with all schools, and there was no significant difference between boys' results and those of girls. GCSE results in the range A*-C were well below the national average, but almost all pupils gained a grade in the range A*-G, in line with results nationally. Results in 1999 were broadly similar to those at the time of the previous inspection, though they dipped a little compared to 1998. Girls outperformed boys but less so than nationally.
129. Observation of lessons and analysis of pupils' work showed that teachers had assessed pupils' work accurately in 1999. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is above average, and better than at the time of the previous inspection. Of the four attainment targets listening, speaking, reading and writing, writing is a strength because pupils have learned to spell accurately and to pay attention to details such as accents. Speaking skills benefit from teaching in French and from training in the relationship between combinations of letters and sounds. Listening and reading are part of everyday classroom routines; in one outstanding lesson in Year 9, in which the teacher conducted a question and answer session with the French 'assistante', higher attaining pupils successfully used listening, reading and writing skills in the same exercise. By the end of the key stage most pupils can create a short text of their own, and some can write longer pieces. Most have some understanding of grammatical detail.
130. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is below average for age, but better than previous GCSE results would suggest. Work is appropriately focused for the most part on examination requirements. Higher attaining pupils work for higher tier examinations, and middle attainers take foundation tier, all aspiring to reach a higher level than the minimum standard. A small group of pupils, mainly those with special educational needs, take a continuously assessed Certificate of Achievement course. The homework file for the top set in Year 11 showed that the pupils were able to produce extended writing, about half of it word processed, which would not be out of place in the first year of a sixth form course. However, many pupils' recall of vocabulary and sentence construction is below average because they do not spend sufficient time on personal study at home to consolidate their learning in lessons.
131. In Key Stage 3, pupils generally make good progress and achieve well. Pupils who attend school regularly make better progress than that seen in many schools, for example in their understanding of the use of past tense verbs in regular and irregular forms. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because these groups have the benefit of good support, but those just above this level do not progress quite so well. Pupils respond well to the opportunity of a fresh start in a new subject where the learning atmosphere is good. Achievement in Key Stage 4 is satisfactory, even though teaching in the classroom is good. Greater progress would be made if pupils in this age group were to be given textbooks to take home to enable them to consolidate their learning and study independently.
132. Most pupils show positive attitudes in lessons, taking trouble over the presentation of written work. In both key stages, concentration is normally good, and pupils work for the full sixty minutes of the lesson. Time is however sometimes wasted when teachers have to deal with

attention-seeking behaviour from a small minority of pupils, mainly older boys. Key Stage 4 pupils are learning to use dictionaries to good effect, and they can retrieve information from the large folders of school produced materials which they have built up since Year 7. Exercise and notebooks are also well kept. However, pupils still need help in organising their work, especially coursework, which could be the key to raising standards.

133. Teaching has improved since the previous inspection and is now good at both key stages. Pupils' learning in the classroom is consequently good. All lessons seen were at least satisfactory, and more than half were good; a few were very good or even excellent. Teachers have good language skills, which they use effectively in lessons. A valuable contribution is made by the French assistante. Teachers plan their lessons very well, working effectively as a team, and the learning materials, which they prepare, are very good. They know their pupils well, care for them appropriately, and manage their behaviour well overall. The subject benefits from the strong leadership and commitment of the head of department.

MUSIC

134. GCSE results in music since 1997 have been consistently in line with national averages for the subject. Pupils of all abilities are now encouraged to choose the subject as an option for GCSE and the wider spread of results across A*-G grades reflects pupils' different abilities. Numbers in the GCSE group are normally small but results are better than other subjects in the school.
135. Pupils make good progress in music lessons as they move through the school. Most pupils enter the school with a very low level of attainment, and standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are below national expectations. However, pupils develop secure skills of performing at a basic level. They can read simple staff notation, and when playing in class ensembles they can maintain a regular beat in an independent part. Higher attaining pupils benefit from learning woodwind and brass instruments. By using these in lessons, pupils in Years 7 and 8 enhanced the cultural experience of other pupils, providing variety of sound and texture in class performances of extracts from 'Peer Gynt' and 'The Nutcracker'. Lower attaining pupils have difficulty in developing fluent technique because keys on electronic instruments are too small and music rests are not used. Pupils' listening skills are developing satisfactorily, and many can distinguish the fine inconsistencies which make one performance better than another. No composing or class singing was observed during the inspection.
136. Standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are in line with national averages. Particular strengths are in performing, and most higher and average attaining pupils perform with confidence, style and good communication. These pupils successfully apply techniques they have been taught for composing but their work lacks imagination and originality. They acquire satisfactory listening responses. Pupils of lower attainment learn to perform simple keyboard pieces, successfully co-ordinating treble and bass parts. At Key Stage 3, pupils with special educational needs achieve standards which are satisfactory in relation to their abilities, and at Key Stage 4 these pupils attain levels of achievement which exceed expectations.
137. The achievements of pupils are satisfactory overall but they are reduced by a number of factors. Singing is underdeveloped. The quality of classroom equipment is unsatisfactory and the lack of provision for information technology restricts attainment in composition, particularly in Key Stage 4, for pupils of all levels of attainment. Electronic keyboards with small keys restrict the development of satisfactory technique, soprano glockenspiels produce very poor sound, and several better quality tuned percussion instruments are unusable, awaiting repair.

138. Pupils respond positively to music lessons in both key stages. They co-operate well, handle equipment with care, and participate readily in practical activities. Higher attaining pupils, in particular, discuss music with great enthusiasm. Pupils listen closely to each other's performances and, when given time to work independently, most use time well. However, a minority of lower attaining pupils in both key stages do not sustain their concentration well if they are unsupervised for other than short periods of time, and make slower progress.
139. Teaching, which in both key stages is almost always good, has a number of very good features. Relationships and control are very good and the teacher's expertise and readiness to demonstrate provide excellent examples for pupils to follow, at the same time introducing a sharing of enthusiasm which pupils appreciate. Lesson objectives are generally clear and the level of challenge is usually well matched to abilities, particularly with higher attaining pupils at Key Stage 3. In one very good lesson, with an upper ability class in Year 7, a brisk pace and high expectations enabled pupils to perform a simple classroom orchestra piece with considerable finesse. However, some material in use in both key stages has little contemporary appeal, and the lack of variety of activities in some lessons in Key Stage 3 causes pupils to lose concentration before the end. Homework is not set at all in Key Stage 3, and the only homework for the GCSE group relates to their coursework. Short and medium-term planning which takes into account the different needs of pupils is unclear.
140. Extra-curricular instrumental work is of a very high standard. This provision considerably enriches pupils' experience, raises their aspirations and creates very good links with the local community which takes pride in pupils' achievements in music. Regular visits by army bands provide pupils with opportunities to play alongside experienced musicians. The department also organises visits to professional performances in prestigious venues such as Chester Cathedral and the Free Trade Hall in Manchester, and plans to involve pupils in the regional session of 'Music for Youth' are currently being formed. To widen pupils' horizons further, more opportunities for the study of world music should be included in the schemes of work for both key stages.
141. Standards of attainment observed during the previous inspection have been maintained, both in lessons and extra-curricular work. However, singing both within the curriculum and in extra-curricular time, is still under-developed, although a small vocal group runs from time to time. Adequate provision for information technology has still not been put in place. The department's planning documentation needs to be more rigorously structured so that pupils' needs are more precisely identified and strategies for meeting these are clarified. Department development planning, which includes provision for improving the quality of resources in a systematic manner, with agreed costs and time scale, also needs to be established.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

142. Most pupils, at the end of Key Stage 3, achieve standards that are average for their age, as at the time of the last inspection. There is no significant difference between girls and boys. Pupils achieve levels of skill expected for their age in hockey and badminton. They use basic attack and defence strategies effectively. Girls know how to use the equipment in the fitness room safely. They know which activities contribute to aerobic fitness but they know less about other areas of fitness. Pupils know how to warm up but they seldom take responsibility for this part of lessons.
143. Pupils achieve standards that are above average for their age by the end of Key Stage 4. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Around half the pupils take the Welsh Certificate of Achievement Award, and over the past two years standards achieved have been high. Almost all pupils achieved at least a merit and in 1999 around two thirds

achieved a distinction. This year the school will enter its first group of pupils for GCSE. These pupils' knowledge and understanding of theory is good, and their practical performance in hockey, football, volleyball, netball, basketball, and trampolining is strong. Pupils' performance in National Curriculum lessons is average for their age. They perform well in trampolining, table tennis and rugby. However, although they use the fitness machines safely, they receive insufficient guidance to help them plan a suitable programme of exercise. Pupils with talent in sports achieve very well. A significant number of pupils represent the school at district, county and occasionally at national level in a range of activities.

144. During Key Stage 3, pupils achieve well compared to their below average starting point. They make good progress and improve their skills, knowledge and understanding of games, gymnastics and health related exercise in response to good teaching. However, they make less progress in increasing their ability to plan and evaluate their own activities. During Key Stage 4, pupils make very good progress and achieve well. GCSE pupils make very good progress in theory and practical performance. Achievement for pupils in National Curriculum lessons is more variable. Pupils make less progress in taking responsibility for their learning because teaching approaches often do not allow for this to happen. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because the teachers know their needs well and, when appropriate, adjust activities accordingly.
145. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good, as at the time of the last inspection. Standards of kit are high and levels of participation are good. Pupils enjoy lessons, and most are enthusiastic, work hard and maintain good levels of activity. They readily answer teachers' questions but are less confident about talking to each other about performance. GCSE pupils present written work neatly and most organise their files well. In some lessons a small number of pupils do not prepare themselves safely and leave long hair and shoe laces loose. The intermittent attendance of a small number of pupils has an adverse affect on their progress. Pupils behave well in all lessons. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good. A good proportion of pupils take part in and benefit from the very good extra-curricular programme.
146. The quality of teaching in both key stages is good and is similar to that found at the last inspection. The teaching of GCSE theory is very good. A major strength of the teaching is the very high standard of discipline established. Teachers are successful in establishing a positive ethos for activity, learning and enjoyment in lessons. They expect pupils to work hard and to improve performance. In accredited courses, expectations are particularly high. Pupils are expected to research collaboratively and to make presentations on their findings. However, there is insufficient opportunity provided for pupils to take responsibility for their learning in practical lessons. Teachers have good subject knowledge on the whole but occasionally non-specialist teaching leads to rather unchallenging lessons in Key Stage 4. Teachers use a good range of teaching approaches. They give clear demonstrations and explanations of skills and game strategies. They question pupils well to help them recall what they have learnt and to develop their understanding. However, there are still not enough opportunities for pupils to plan and evaluate performance, which was a criticism at the last inspection. In some lessons the non-participating pupils are not as involved in learning as they could be and there are missed opportunities in practical lessons to use whiteboard or display material to help pupils learn the language demands of the subject. In Key Stage 4, teachers give suitable homework which encourages pupils to apply their knowledge to new situations. However the policy of keeping all text books in school restricts pupils' ability to read more widely and develop their interest in the subject independently.
147. There is an outstanding range of facilities which are used well to promote high standards. In 1999, the school was successful in gaining two awards, which reflect the high quality of provision. These are the Sports Mark Award and the Football Charter Award. The department is very well managed. A great enthusiasm for the subject and commitment to

the best interests of the pupils ensures that the department is constantly seeking ways to improve the provision and standards. The most significant improvement since the last inspection is the introduction of accreditation for physical education, including GCSE, and the success of pupils in the Certificate of Achievement.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

148. Since the last inspection, a GCSE short course in religious education has been introduced at Key Stage 4. However, the school is not yet fully meeting statutory requirements at this key stage. Only pupils in the top three of five bands take the examination course and full coverage of the Locally Agreed Syllabus requirements is not yet available for all at Key Stage 4. This is due to a significant shortage of curriculum time for the subject. As a result, some elements of the GCSE short course are now taught in Year 9 and this is putting increasing pressure on the department's ability to cover the Locally Agreed Syllabus at Key Stage 3 effectively. In 1999 there were no grade A*-C passes in the GCSE short course examination. Results were significantly below the national average. The numbers gaining an A*-G pass were only just over half the national average. Overall standards of attainment in lessons reflect these examination grades.
149. Attainment in lessons and in samples of pupil work is below the expectations of the Locally Agreed Syllabus at Key Stage 3 and well below at Key Stage 4. There are a number of factors affecting pupil achievement: insufficient curriculum time, pupils' often negative attitudes and inexperienced teaching. Pupils at both key stages have very limited recall and background knowledge in any depth concerning the world's major religions. There is a lack of understanding and appreciation of the values and beliefs of the major world faiths as reflected in contemporary Britain. Hence, pupils are unprepared to meet the demands of a broader, multi-cultural society. However, there are developing strengths in their consideration of moral and ethical issues, which they generally find to be more relevant. For example, in a Year 8 lower set class pupils were able to give their own definitions of 'honesty' with examples. In a Year 10 examination group there was some thoughtful and considered argument, by about one-third of the pupils, on issues surrounding abortion. This helped to raise the quality of the written notes being taken by the class as a whole.
150. Learning and progress in lessons at Key Stage 3 is mainly unsatisfactory and sometimes poor. This is mainly due to insecure teaching methods, which rely too heavily on prepared worksheet material rather than involving pupils more actively in discussion and debate. There can consequently be a loss of interest on the part of the pupils which leads to discipline problems. Where the teaching positively involves the pupils, interest is maintained and satisfactory progress is made. This occurs more often when a classroom assistant or support teacher is present and team teaching takes place. Pupils with behaviour or attitude problems are more effectively managed and, particularly at Key Stage 4, pupils are provided with a broader perspective on the subject through the combined contributions of both teachers. As a result, learning in lessons observed at Key Stage 4 is mainly satisfactory and sometimes good.
151. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour at Key Stage 3 are mainly unsatisfactory and sometimes poor. At Key Stage 4 they are mainly satisfactory and sometimes good. This reflects the general quality of the teaching and learning experiences the pupils receive at the different key stages. The general approach to the subject by a significant number of pupils can be negative because they do not appreciate the relevance of the subject to their everyday lives. Underdeveloped discussion and oral literacy skills, especially a willingness to exchange and debate ideas, also limit their potential involvement in lessons. Pupils are often content to make summary notes from information provided by the teacher but are reticent when it comes to expressing their personal views and opinions.

152. Teaching overall is very variable and ranges from satisfactory to poor. It is mainly unsatisfactory at Key Stage 3 and mainly satisfactory at Key Stage 4. To improve the teaching, there is a need to develop a wider range of strategies to help some teachers to manage pupils' behaviour. Good developmental support is currently being provided within the school by senior staff. The setting of homework is limited and unsatisfactory.
153. The recently appointed teacher has made good progress in developing a draft scheme of work. In addition to improving it, the department needs to establish its priorities for future development. The management role of the specialist teacher is currently somewhat unclear. Attention is being paid to the development of resources for the subject. However, pupils do not have access to the necessary textbooks, workbooks or adequate multi-faith research resources to support homework and independent learning. Neither does the subject have adequate access to computers nor research material in electronic form. Reporting of the subject to parents is not adequately related to the requirements of the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Most of all, attention should be paid to strategies which will raise the profile and credibility of the subject in the eyes of the pupils as a first step to improving attitudes and raising examination standards.

OTHER SUBJECTS TAUGHT AT KEY STAGE 4

Child Development

154. The GCSE child development course provides a valuable additional opportunity for pupils. Those that take this course work hard and particularly enjoy the child study. Most pupils make good progress, including those with special educational needs. The proportion of pupils who achieve A*-C grades at GCSE is well below average. Standards in lessons are below average for age. Teaching in the subject is satisfactory overall and sometimes good.

Business education

155. GCSE results are well below the national average. Pupils have good attitudes towards the subject, and standards are rising compared with the 1999 GCSE results. Many pupils in Years 10 and 11 are currently attaining standards which relate well to grades C and D at GCSE. There is also some high attainment in Year 11, commensurate with grades A and B. Teaching in the subject is satisfactory overall and often good.