

INSPECTION REPORT

Lymm High School

Lymm

LEA area: Warrington

Unique Reference Number: 111448

Headteacher: Mr R A Lounds

Reporting inspector: Mr D Morton

Dates of inspection: 19-26 November 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708061

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

| | |
|------------------------------|---|
| Type of school: | Comprehensive |
| Type of control: | Voluntary Controlled |
| Age range of pupils: | 11-18 |
| Gender of pupils: | Mixed |
| School address: | Oughtrington Lane Lymm Cheshire WA13 0RB |
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| Appropriate authority: | Governing Body |
| Name of chair of governors: | Mr G Hawley |
| Date of previous inspection: | November 1994 |

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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|----------------------|--|---|
| David Morton | Performing arts | Attainment and progress Leadership and management Teaching |
| Janet Harrison | Equal opportunities | Attendance Attitudes, behaviour and personal development Partnership with parents and the community Pupils' guidance and welfare |
| Colin Burke | Business studies Economics | |
| Robert Carvell | Art | |
| John Clay | Design and technology | |
| Roger Crawford | Information technology[IT] | |
| Frances Findlay | English | Learning resource centre |
| Douglas Howorth | Geography | Curriculum and assessment |
| John Paddick | Mathematics | Efficiency |
| Anthony Pearson | Religious education | Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development |
| Roy Pitcher | Special educational needs English as an additional language | |
| Ann Powell | Modern foreign languages | |
| John Ratcliffe | Modern foreign languages | |
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| Gillian Salter-Smith | Physical education | Staffing, accommodation and learning resources |
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MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well

- Examination and test results are well above average; GCSE results in 1999 showed a marked improvement on those of previous years and 'A' Level results, too, improved.
- Quality and range of pupils' writing are good, especially in Years 10 and 11.
- Impressive richness of learning in art and the history department is a centre for quality and innovation.
- Pupils have very good attitudes to work and their behaviour, too, is very good.
- Range and take-up of extra-curricular activities are excellent.
- Very good teaching in the sixth form.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is good.
- Leadership and management of the school are very good.
- Very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and one result of this is the very good relationships which exist within the community of the school.
- Lymm High School is a significantly improving school.

Where the school has weaknesses

- I. Insufficient attention has been given to ensuring that all teaching strives to provide a quality of learning as good as that of the very best teaching. There is, therefore, a degree of under-achievement amongst some pupils capable of the highest attainment.
- II. There is inadequate provision and use of information technology to support learning in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form.

Lymm High School is a good and improving school with many outstanding features. Its weaknesses will form the basis of the governors' action plan which will be sent to all parents and carers of pupils at the school.

How the school has improved since the last inspection

The school has improved in a number of areas since the previous inspection in November 1994. In particular, results in examinations have improved significantly, especially the GCSE results of 1999. Teaching in most subjects has also improved. The school still does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils, and the use of information technology remains limited in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form. Accommodation is mostly good and put to effective use. For example, standards in the performing arts are high despite poor facilities for dance and drama; there is overcrowding in the sixth form social areas. All other areas of concern have been met, most notably the better organisation of time facilitated by the introduction of lessons of an hour's duration and the significant improvement to the provision and practice for pupils with special educational needs. The school's development and management plans are very good and ensure that priorities for future improvement are clear and achievable. There is a new management structure which is proving to be effective; leadership by the headship team has already shown its capacity to maintain an improving ethos in all aspects of the school.

Standards in subjects

The following table shows standards achieved by 14, 16 and 18 year olds in national tests, GCSE and A/AS-level examinations in 1999.

| Performance in: | Compared with all schools | Compared with similar schools | Grade |
|-----------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------|-------|
| | | | K |
| | | | ey |
| | | <i>well above average</i> | A |
| | | <i>above average</i> | B |

| | | | | |
|--------------------------|---|-----|---------------------------|---|
| Key Stage 3 Test English | A | A | <i>average</i> | C |
| GCSE Examinations | A | A | <i>below average</i> | D |
| A/AS – levels | B | N/A | <i>well below average</i> | E |

Results in national tests for 14 year olds have been consistently well above the national average in English, mathematics and science over recent years. In 1999 the overall performance of boys improved on the previous year and was better than that of girls, although girls continued to perform better than boys in English. The national test results are well above the average for similar schools and an improvement on the recent past. The percentage of pupils achieving the higher Level 6 and above is considerably higher than that found in similar schools.

GCSE results have improved gradually in recent years and always been well above the national average. In 1999 however, there was a very significant improvement in results, from 60 per cent of pupils achieving five or more passes at grades A*-C in 1998 to 74 per cent in 1999. The results in 1999 put the school amongst the highest achieving comprehensive schools in the country. These results are also well above average when compared with similar schools, which is also a significant improvement on the recent past. In particular mathematics, science, geography, some strands of design and technology, French, information technology and religious studies improved considerably on the results of 1998. In 1999 for the first time, 20 pupils took a GCSE examination in drama and achieved exceptionally good results, taking one year for a course which normally covers two years.

In 1999, the sixth form results improved on those of 1998 by a small margin and are above the national average. For students entered for two or more A-Levels, the average points score was 18.8 compared with 17.9 in 1998. In both years girls performed better than boys. In the higher A and B grades, results in English literature, geography, history, French, German, mathematics and chemistry improved significantly in 1999, whilst students in art and design maintained high levels of A and B passes and biology and business studies maintained very good overall A-E pass rates. Students of sports studies did not achieve results as good as those in 1998. In 1999 GNVQ courses, of the 33 students who entered for examinations, 91 per cent were successful.

Quality of teaching

| | Overall quality | Most effective in: | Least effective in: |
|-------------|------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| Years 7-9 | Good | Art, drama, geography, history | Mathematics, design and technology |
| Years 10-11 | Good | Art, business studies, drama, history, physical education | Mathematics |
| Sixth form | Very Good | Art, history, physical education | Music |
| English | Good | | |
| Mathematics | Satisfactory | | |

Teaching was satisfactory or better in 98.8 per cent of lessons. Teaching was very good or better in 25.9 per cent and good in a further 46.3 per cent of lessons. The very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was in English and mathematics, but in all subjects teaching overall was satisfactory or better and in 72.2 per cent good or better. Where teaching was very good or excellent, all pupils or students were given demanding activities and were expected to do well in them. Lessons were conducted at a good rate, used a variety of teaching techniques and provided learning experiences of a very good quality. Parents' concerns about the teaching of mathematics and French have some substance; however, new schemes of work have recently been introduced and results in French at GCSE level in 1999 showed a marked improvement and the teaching of the subject is now good in years 7 to 9 and never less than satisfactory in other years throughout the school.

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

Other aspects of the school

| Aspect | Comment |
|---|---|
| Behaviour | Very good: pupils' attitudes to learning lead to levels of success which are generally above or well above average. |
| Attendance | Good: attendance is above average but there is some lack of punctuality, especially at the start of periods 2 and 4. |
| Ethos* | Very good: the school generates an appropriate ethos for learning which encourages a culture of success. |
| Leadership and management | Very good: the headteacher, headship team and governing body give an effective and purposeful lead to the school. The school is managed efficiently; heads of key stages, departments, faculties and year are ensuring that the school's emphasis on improving standards is maintained. Governors are well informed and active. |
| Curriculum | Very good: all pupils receive an appropriate curriculum with a good range of choices in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form. The school provides an excellent range of extra-curricular activities, the take-up of which indicates their popularity with pupils. Very good use is made of procedures for assessment. |
| Pupils with special educational needs | Good overall, especially in Years 7 to 9. This aspect of the school's provision has improved significantly in recent years. |
| Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development | Very good overall: provision for pupils' moral and social development is especially good. |
| Staffing, resources and accommodation | Good overall: teachers are well qualified and support staff effective; resources and accommodation are generally good, although there is overcrowding of social areas in the sixth form and facilities for the performing arts are inadequate. |
| Value for money | Good: there have been significant improvements in examination results and the quality of learning experiences provided for pupils is very good. |

**Ethos is the climate for learning: attitudes to work, relationships and the commitment to high standards.*

The parents' views of the school

What most parents like about the school

- III. It enables pupils to achieve good standards.
- IV. It provides a good range of extra-curricular activities.
- V. It achieves high standards of behaviour.
- VI. It is a happy school.

What some parents are not happy about

- VII. The amount of homework set, some
- VIII. A small minority expressed concern
- IX. The extent of information about the school
- X. The teaching of French and mathematics.

Inspectors agree with the positive views expressed by parents. They feel that the amount of homework set for each year group is about right, although some teachers do not set homework to a consistent pattern. The inspectors found no evidence to support the concerns of a minority of parents regarding the ways in which it handles complaints. Inspectors found considerable evidence of good and relevant information which is being sent out to parents. Inspectors agree there is insufficient variety in the teaching of French and mathematics; however, in French in particular, there are clear signs of improvements beginning to have a positive impact on results.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

In order to sustain its current ethos as an improving school, the headteacher, governors and staff should:

XI. Ensure that all teaching strives to provide a quality of learning as good as that of teaching at its best by:

- establishing a programme for monitoring and supporting teaching,
- agreeing a focus for each lesson to be monitored which is linked to the perceived needs of individual teachers or to current school or departmental initiatives,
- sharing good practice in aspects of teaching which can be identified as enabling pupils to be effective learners making very good progress towards achieving even higher standards,
- having clear learning objectives designed to meet the differing learning needs of all pupils within a class,
- ensuring that the work set is well matched to the needs of the highest attainers;

(see paragraphs: 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 23, 24, 25, 27, 31, 33, 67, 76, 97, 113, 124, 141, 157, 172, 201, 214)

● Improve beyond the current average the provision and use information technology to support learning more significantly in Years 10, 11 and the sixth form by:

- taking steps to increase the confidence of more teachers in the use of computers,
- planning suitable tasks in information technology for pupils and students of different levels of attainment,
- ensuring that the opportunities to use information technology at Key Stage 4 are sufficient to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum,
- making certain the sixth form students use modern technology in presenting aspects of their work in keeping with the increasing demands of the age of information,
- ensuring that teachers of all subjects know which skills in the use of information technology are being taught and are therefore available to be used to enhance learning in different subjects,
- creating a clear map of pupils' experiences of information technology as they move through the school.

(see paragraphs: 28, 32, 33, 35, 73, 134, 139, 149, 154, 161, 165, 166, 172, 194, 213)

In addition there are concerns which governors, in consultation with the local education authority, should include in their Action Plan:

- the inadequacy of accommodation for the performing arts – in particular the lack of an equipped drama studio and a suitable space and floor for dance

(see paragraphs: 78, 175)

and

- overcrowding in the social accommodation for the sixth form.

(see paragraphs: 60, 79)

- INTRODUCTION

- Characteristics of the school

1. Lymm High School is a mixed 11-19 comprehensive school with 1654 pupils on roll. It is much larger than most secondary schools. It is located in the eastern side of the village of Lymm within the Warrington local education authority. In 1996 the school was designated as a specialist language college under the DfEE's specialist school initiative. The school serves a wide geographical area which is mixed socio-economically but is weighted towards children whose parents come from professional backgrounds. Pupils' overall attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 is well above average. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is 2.7 per cent which is much below the national average and lower than at the time of the previous inspection. There are 161 pupils on the register of special educational needs and this is broadly in line with the national average; there are 24 pupils with statements of special educational need and this as a proportion of the total school population is below the national average.

2. In recent years the school has been oversubscribed and has grown in size. Its popularity is reflected in the number of students who choose the school for their 16-19 education. This has led to some pressure on social space and group sizes are large in certain subjects in Year 12. Equally there are groups of less than ten, particularly in newly introduced subjects or those with minority appeal. The school is in consultation with the local education authority about increasing numbers and the consequent need to review its provision of accommodation.

3. Playing-field space is adequate at present although the growth in numbers will require additional space. Plans are well advanced for the acquisition of more space within the near future. Additionally, an existing partnership with Lymm Oughtrington Park Cricket Club gives the school access to an extra grass wicket during the summer months. Amongst the school's other facilities is the residential centre at Ty'n-y-Felin, Anglesey. This centre is owned by the trustees of the school and all pupils spend some time there during their time as a member of the school.

4. The school's language centre offers pupils and students in the sixth form the opportunity to study a range of modern foreign languages. French and German are taught in Years 7 to 9 and Spanish is an additional option in Years 10 and 11. Sixth form students can also choose to study Italian, Japanese and Russian. The centre, newly completed in 1997, affords the opportunity to include modern facilities for language teaching and learning; modern technology complements well equipped teaching spaces.

5. The school's motto is: **Working Together to Achieve Success**. Lymm High School is keen to raise the achievement of all pupils and students. Provision for pupils with special educational needs has been given a high priority to ensure those pupils experiencing learning difficulties are appropriately supported. A significant number of pupils and sixth form students are supported through a mentoring programme. In line with statutory requirements the school has set itself appropriate and challenging targets for attainment.

-

- **Key indicators**

- **Attainment at Key Stage 3¹**

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3
for latest reporting year:

| Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
|------|------|-------|-------|
| 1999 | 122 | 119 | 241 |

| National Curriculum Test Results | | English | Mathematics | Science |
|---|----------|---------|-------------|---------|
| Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above | Boys | 102 | 102 | 97 |
| | Girls | 103 | 85 | 90 |
| | Total | 205 | 187 | 187 |
| Percentage at NC Level 5 or above | School | 85(89) | 78(75) | 78(83) |
| | National | 63(65) | 62(59) | 55(56) |
| Percentage at NC Level 6 or above | School | 56(58) | 55(52) | 52(53) |
| | National | 28(34) | 38(36) | 23(27) |

| Teacher Assessments | | English | Mathematics | Science |
|---|----------|---------|-------------|---------|
| Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above | Boys | 99 | 103 | 100 |
| | Girls | 104 | 89 | 98 |
| | Total | 203 | 192 | 198 |
| Percentage at NC Level 5 or above | School | 84(79) | 80(72) | 82(73) |
| | National | 64(62) | 64(63) | 60(62) |
| Percentage at NC Level 6 or above | School | 52(40) | 57(49) | 46(53) |
| | National | 31(30) | 37(37) | 28(30) |

Attainment at Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest
Reporting year:

| Year | Boys | Girls | Total |
|------|------|-------|-------|
| 1999 | 111 | 128 | 239 |

| GCSE Results | | 5 or more grades A* to C | 5 or more grades A* to G | 1 or more grades A* to G |
|---|----------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Number of pupils Achieving standard specified | Boys | 76 | 108 | 109 |
| | Girls | 100 | 124 | 125 |
| | Total | 176 | 232 | 234 |
| Percentage achieving Standard specified | School | 74(60) | 97(95) | 98(98) |
| | National | 46(45) | 88(90) | 95(97) |

¹ Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year

Attainment in the Sixth Form

| Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 who were entered for GCE A/AS examination in the latest reporting year: | | Year | Female | Total |
|---|---|--|------------|----------|
| | | 1999 | 58 | 63 |
| Average A/AS Points score Per candidate | For candidates entered for 2 or more A-Levels or equivalent | For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-Levels or equivalent | | |
| | Male Female All | Male | Female | All |
| School | 18.2(17.4) | 19.4(18.4) | 18.8(17.9) | N/a(2.8) |
| National | N/a | N/a | 17.8(17.6) | N/a(3.1) |

| Number in final year of approved vocational qualifications and Percentage of <i>such students</i> who achieved these qualifications: | Number | % Success rate |
|--|--------|----------------|
| School | 33 | 91% |
| National | | N/a |

Attendance

| Percentage of half days (sessions) missed | Through absence for the latest complete Reporting year: | Authorised Absence | Unauthorised Absence | School National comparative data | % |
|---|---|--------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|-----|
| | | | | School | 5.9 |
| | | | | National comparative data | 7.1 |
| | | | | School | 0.2 |
| | | | | National comparative data | 1.1 |

Exclusions

| Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year: | Fixed period | Permanent | Number |
|--|--------------|-----------|--------|
| | | | 8 |
| | | | 0 |

Quality of teaching

| Percentage of teaching observed which is: | % |
|---|------|
| Very good or better | 25.9 |
| Satisfactory or better | 98.8 |
| Less than satisfactory | 1.2 |

- **PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL**

- **EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL**

- **Attainment and progress**

6. There has been a steady improvement in levels of attainment since the previous inspection. There was a significant improvement in results in GCSE examinations in 1999 over those of 1998.

7. In the 1999 National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 pupils achieved results which were well above the national average when compared with all schools and similar schools. These results are not statistically different from those of 1998. In 1999 the overall average points score achieved by pupils in English and mathematics was better than that for science, despite the teaching of science being consistently better than that of English and mathematics. Nonetheless, average scores in all three subjects were well above average. Boys performed better than girls at the higher grades in mathematics and science. In English there was little difference in the performance of girls and boys at the higher grades. In recent years there has been a trend of improvement broadly in line with that found nationally.

8. In GCSE examinations in 1999 the percentage of pupils achieving five or more passes at the higher grades A*-C was well above the national average. Similarly, the percentage of pupils achieving five or more passes across the full range of grades was also above the national average but not significantly different from the previous year. The key to the improvement lies in the higher proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades. In 1999, 24.5 per cent against 19.9 per cent in 1998 were A* or A grades. The following subjects were particularly successful in achieving around a quarter of A* or A grade passes or better: English literature, biology, chemistry, physics, art, design and technology (systems and control), geography, German, history, information technology, physical education and religious studies. Despite overall good results, the following departments failed to achieve at least a fifth of passes at grades A* or A: design and technology (food, resistant materials and textiles), French, information studies, music and Spanish. The teaching profile in this group of subjects is not as consistently good as that of the first group achieving the higher proportion of A* and A grades. Although results were also well above the national average in 1998, the average points score in 1999 was higher, accounting for a marked improvement on the previous year. Over the past four years improvement in GCSE results show a rising trend but at a slower rate than that found nationally, although there is a steep acceleration in 1999. Girls perform better than boys overall in attaining the higher GCSE grades A*-C, although there is little difference across the full range of grades. GCSE results were above or in line with the national average in all subjects except Spanish, which has only recently been introduced, and music. Overall, the school out-performed the targets it set itself for the 1999 GCSE examinations.

9. In the sixth form students took an average of 3 A-Level subjects in 1999 and achieved an average of 2.8 passes. Of all A-Level examinations taken 44.7 per cent of students achieved the higher A or B passes. The overall average points score was 18.8 which was above the national average, which was 17.8. Over half of the students taking the subject achieved the higher grade passes at A and B in English literature, history, art, German, further mathematics, chemistry, biology, economics and computing. The subjects with the smallest percentage achieving these higher grades were geography, sports studies and music technology. In recent years average points score per candidate has fluctuated more than those nationally, which generally show an improving trend. In school, the pattern is less even but there was a small improvement in 1999 over 1998. Girls performed better than boys, achieving an average points score of 19.4 against the boys' 18.2. In GNVQ examinations in advanced business studies and manufacturing and intermediate business studies, 33 students obtained qualifications, 11 of them at distinction level and 13 at merit level.

10. Overall levels of attainment are well above average, taking account of examination results, standards in lessons and those found in pupils' books and files. It can be seen, therefore, that examination results broadly confirm judgements inspectors were able to make during the inspection. Standards at Key Stages 3 and 4 are significantly better overall than in the sixth form where the best teaching is sometimes found. This, too, is reflected in examination results. On entry to Year 7 the overall attainment of pupils is well above average. Pupils make good progress overall as the school strives to maintain or improve on pupils' prior attainment. Progress at Key Stage 3 is good in science, drama, modern languages, music, physical education and religious education, and very good in art, geography and history; in all other subjects rates of progress are satisfactory. At Key Stage 4, progress is good in

business studies, English, science, design and technology, geography, history, information technology, modern languages, music, physical education and religious education, and very good in art and drama; in mathematics rates of progress are satisfactory. Progress in individual lessons is almost always satisfactory and is good in over half of all lessons and very good or excellent in almost a further quarter of all lessons at Key Stages 3 and 4. This is in response to good attitudes of pupils and consistently good or better teaching in two-thirds of lessons at Key Stage 3 and almost three-quarters of lessons at Key Stage 4. The school adds value during Key Stage 4.

11. Pupils make good progress in developing investigative skills in science where work is planned to meet the differing needs of pupils; at Key Stage 4 in English and in other subjects, pupils improve the range and quality of their writing, acquiring and using drafting and re-drafting skills well. In geography and history pupils acquire the basic skills of investigation and interpretation effectively and apply them thoughtfully to a range of situations and events. In art and drama pupils acquire a good background in conventions and genres of the disciplines and apply what they learn to their own work. In physical education pupils develop skills, often to representative levels, in a wide range of sports.

12. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress at Key Stage 3 and good general progress at Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 3 the pupils benefit from very skilful teaching of reading and spelling and also from some small classes and withdrawal groups. Progress in mathematics is satisfactory. At Key Stage 4 pupils with special educational needs generally make good progress when they study GCSE courses in small classes where there are additional support teachers.

13. Across both Key Stages 3 and 4 pupils' skills in speaking and listening are satisfactory. They can use the spoken word appropriately informally but have little opportunity other than in drama to use it in a range of real and imagined circumstances. Pupils' skills in reading at both key stages improve steadily from a very good base during Years 7 to 11. They can enjoy and respond to a range of texts and this experience informs their own writing. This, too, improves as pupils move through the school and at Key Stage 4 most pupils are able to write well in a full range of forms and styles. Pupils' numeracy skills are well above average and are used to enhance learning in a number of subjects. Pupils can draw and interpret graphs and make measurements with good levels of accuracy. Pupils generate and analyse patterns in art and use spreadsheets when required in a range of subjects. However, the use of information technology generally is underdeveloped throughout Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Pupils and students who study the subject for examinations do well, but the experience and development of skills of others are patchy.

14. In the sixth form overall standards in examinations are on the border of average and above and those found in lessons are usually average but occasionally above average. Rates of progress overall are good across the school and the teaching in the sixth form is very good. The apparent anomalies these judgements suggest are caused by a minority of teaching which does not challenge sufficiently students capable of higher attainment, notably at A-Level in English language, geography, French, physics, Christian theology, business studies and sociology. In these subjects, less than two-fifths achieved the higher A and B grades in 1999 against an overall figure of 44.7 per cent, which itself is lower than performance at the end of Key Stage 4 suggests is possible. Similar smaller percentages of passes at the higher grades occurred in 1998 in English language, geography, French, Christian theology, German, mathematics, chemistry, design and technology and music. If performance in these subjects in 1999 had matched the best results in English literature, chemistry, biology, economics and computing overall attainment in the sixth form would also have been likely to be well above average. The achievement of students in these subjects distorts the overall picture of very good teaching and good progress. Sometimes sixth form teaching is too teacher-directed with the result that not all students have full personal engagement with their learning. In French, for example, students have too little time to practise their own speaking. Sometimes, in religious education the aims of lessons are not made clear to students or insufficient time is allowed for students to reflect and make a personal response to what is learned. Insufficient opportunities are taken to share good practice in teaching, especially with students capable of the highest attainment. Some teaching of higher-attaining students is not generally as good as the best teaching. Attainment, therefore, is currently uneven across a range of subjects. All subjects do not match those where the majority of students obtain the higher A and B grades, namely English literature, history, German, art and design, further mathematics, chemistry, biology, economics and computing.

15. Rates of progress in the sixth form are good in business studies, design and technology, economics, geography, mathematics, modern languages overall, performing arts and religious education, science, and very good in art, history and physical education; students make satisfactory progress in English, information technology and music.

Overall, there is some under-achievement in the sixth form. Students are pleased with systems which are in place for tracking their progress and feel well informed of how well they are performing. The green card system provides a platform for discussions with teachers about their progress and learning needs. The good percentage of very good and excellent teaching is spread sparingly across subjects; nonetheless insufficient attention is currently given to learning from this practice in order to improve teaching and thus increase rates of progress more widely; value added in comparison with levels of attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is not as great as could be expected.

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Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

16. Pupils have very good attitudes towards learning. This has a significantly positive effect on the standards they achieve at the school. Parents are pleased with the standards of behaviour. Pupils' response in lessons is usually good and often very good. Pupils are nearly always interested in their lessons and show a desire to succeed. They are conscientious in personal study and are capable of good independent research. They usually sustain concentration well, although on a few occasions they can flag towards the end of the hour-long lessons, particularly before the late lunch hour or if there is insufficient variety of approaches to learning and teaching.

17. The school is orderly. Pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school. There are some exceptions to these good standards, but these are rare. For example, too much talk in class or some pushing in the crowded narrow stairwells at lesson transfer time. Pupils are excluded for short periods for serious offences, but the overall rate of exclusions is low compared to similar schools nationally.

18. The quality of relationships in the school is high. Group and collaborative work is a strength. Pupils are proud of their school and the facilities available and treat these with respect. They are confident in the school's anti-bullying procedures. Sixth formers play a valuable role in supporting the younger pupils, as part of the 'just ask me' project.

19. Pupils in all year groups take full advantage of the good opportunities provided for their personal development. In Year 8 pupils rise to the challenge to convert £10 into a profit by making and selling products at the autumn fayre in support of Ty'n-y-felin, the school's residential centre in Anglesey. After their mock examinations in the autumn term Year 11 organise a concert for senior citizens in the village. Years 9 and 11 help as prefects in the running of the school. The school council contributes effectively to school decision making.

20. Pupils with special educational needs have a good attitude to school at both key stages. At Key Stage 3 this is particularly so when good support teachers and appropriate learning resources are available. In the small withdrawal groups pupils work intensively and have very good relations with the teachers. Pupils move between the varied tasks using computers and books, their oral contributions are purposeful. The 'lunchtime club' is popular and contributes a great deal to the pupils' sense of well being and progress.

Attendance

21. Pupils continue to show the good attitudes towards attending school, which were noted in the previous inspection. Attendance last year was nearly 95 per cent, which is well above national averages.

22. Pupils are generally punctual to arrive at school in the mornings. However there are some latecomers to lessons, which can make for a unsettled start. This occurs particularly at the start of periods 2 and 4, often because periods 1 and 3 do not finish on time.

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QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

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Teaching

23. The quality of teaching has improved in most subjects since the previous inspection. For example, subject teachers have worked with members of the learning support department to ensure that work is planned effectively to meet the learning needs of different pupils. Departments are now producing learning materials which are generally of a good quality. A wider variety of learning and teaching methods are used by more teachers although this remains

an area warranting further development. In most lessons, although it remains an issue in some lessons in mathematics, lessons are taught at a good pace, consistently engaging the interests of pupils. The best teaching has responded to the opportunities provided by longer periods. Generally, teachers are more aware of the need to challenge pupils although there is still too little challenge sometimes made of those pupils capable of the highest attainment. Teaching overall is consistently good and very good teaching occurs in a third of lessons in the sixth form.

24. Teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 ensures that progress overall is good. However, progress is very good in less than a fifth of lessons owing to teaching, equally, being very good in a similar proportion of lessons. There is a shortfall in attainment amongst those capable of the highest attainment. The proportion of very good or excellent teaching is almost 26 per cent; however good practice is not widely shared and too small a proportion of pupils at these key stages build on their prior attainment to achieve the high A* and A grades in GCSE examinations. In only biology, geography and information technology do more than half of those pupils taking the examination achieve the two highest grades; in chemistry and physics a further third of pupils achieve the highest grade. In all other subjects, therefore, less than a third of all pupils taking the examination achieve A* or A grades. The strategies employed by teachers who achieve success for higher-attaining pupils are not considered sufficiently amongst all teachers; few strategies are currently in place to improve all teaching to that of the best.

25. At Key Stage 3 teaching is very good in art, drama, geography, history, and good in information technology, modern languages, music, physical education, religious education and science. Teaching is satisfactory at this key stage in design and technology, English and mathematics. Examples of very good teaching include the excellent use of resources in a Year 7 geography lesson where each group had a small-scale map of Lymm in 1968 and a larger-scale more recent map to help them trace changes in land use. The same year group uses lively worksheets that give a challenging focus in English lessons to work on 'The Tempest'. Pupils are quick to praise the quality of their learning experiences in the active approach to history teaching. At Key Stage 4 teaching is very good in art, business studies, history, physical education and good in design and technology, drama, English, geography, information technology, modern languages, music, religious education and science. Teaching is satisfactory at this key stage in mathematics. In this key stage successful teaching is exemplified in the confidence pupils feel in the subject knowledge of teachers of science. For example in Year 10, very clear teaching with well-stated learning objectives in a lesson about magnetism using a variety of related activities led to successful learning and the production by pupils of a good magnetic field. The consistent use of Spanish in a Year 10 well-paced lesson using resources effectively helped to build up the knowledge, skills and confidence of pupils in their own use of the language. All pupils value their art lessons, enjoying the tone of the lessons and responding well to the rich stimulus provided by teachers and the environment in the art rooms. They value the opportunities provided for them to experiment and take responsibility for their own learning. In some subjects this flair is often missing and pupils have infrequent opportunities to state their own views, respond to new learning in debate or through an applied activities. Often, in design and technology for example, they are tied too tightly to worksheets and subjected to too much safe and too little inspiring teaching where they feel they can spread their own wings in the context of making learning their own. Without some opportunities which encourage this response, pupils sometimes drift off into learning which lacks energy and an identifiable purpose; this can lead to underachievement.

26. Very good teaching in the sixth form ensures that progress overall is good and in some cases very good. Teaching is very good in the sixth form overall in a third of lessons spread across most subjects. Teaching is consistently very good in art, history and physical education. It is consistently good in business studies, design and technology, economics, geography, information technology, mathematics, modern languages, religious education and science. Teaching is satisfactory in the sixth form in English and music.

27. Teaching in the sixth form usually extends pupils' attainment beyond that of the main school and the best teaching finds a range of strategies more suited to older students. Often these take the form of seminar or tutorial sessions that allow learning to be more detailed and areas of enquiry to be more thorough. Teachers are able to adapt their styles to different types of course, whether the tightly academic or the applied practical courses in, for example, the arts or GNVQ manufacturing or business studies. Teaching in mathematics is better in the sixth form than in Years 7 to 11. Here the teaching has a clear focus and relates closely to the needs of the A-Level examination. Good specialist teaching across the sciences is a strength of sixth form teaching. Pupils acquire the critical skills necessary for successful problem solving. However, some teaching of science in the sixth form is too tightly directed by the teacher and students do not so readily acquire the habits of independent learners; this slows

down the progress and levels of attainment of those capable of higher attainment. Some of the best teaching of sixth form students is in art and history. In both subjects the teachers' expectations of students achievements are very high and they do not settle easily for less than the students' best. In art this is reflected in the quality and scope of students' sketchbooks as well as in work on a bigger scale. In history, teachers use interactive approaches and a challenging style. Students achieve the highest grades in history because of the challenges put before them and good resources are well used. Students are required to think and argue their case in assessing cause and effect. In information technology in the sixth form teaching ensures a good balance across the different strands of the subject. The depth of learning in modern languages, especially German, is a feature of teaching in the sixth form. The very good and secure knowledge of the subject and use of the foreign language by teachers enables students to make good progress, although in French insufficient responsibility is sometimes given to students during oral work. This slows down their progress with a corresponding impact on their possible levels of attainment. Very good teaching in physical education, supported through the many additional sporting activities, helps to make sport a strength of the school. Sixth form students help run activities for younger pupils.

28. An important and very successful programme of teaching for all sixth form students is that of the key skills programme which is linked to the imaginative and effective Lymm Award. The key skills programme is to be fully implemented in September 2000 but pilots have been running in preparation as teachers give focus to present practice in the areas of communication, application of number and IT. Teachers are applying new skills recently learned themselves and are beginning to achieve success and expect students to gain certification in the national programme of key skills. Some teachers are seeking to become more proficient in their own use of IT in support of this programme. The Lymm Award is an innovative programme requiring specific teaching skills which sixth form teachers have developed effectively in recent years. An early focus is on team-building and this is linked to the key skills programme and involves the successful teaching of the skills of communication, organisation, leadership, cooperation and planning and leads to a community project. Many teachers have honed new and innovative teaching skills in order to ensure the success of this programme. This effective teaching has led to the Lymm Award being valued by pupils and parents. It is intended to ensure that most pupils will lead on from it into an A-Level course in general studies.

29. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of their subjects are generally good. They are mostly enthusiastic about their subjects and in the very best teaching spread their enthusiasm amongst pupils and students. Class management is very good. Teachers generally enjoy purposeful relationships with pupils who cooperate well in lessons and are generally keen to learn. Teachers generally make effective use of questioning. Pupils expect to consider answers fully, drawing on previously acquired knowledge and understanding to address new issues. During these good lessons, teachers are aware of how to pace their interventions for best effect, knowing when to leave pupils to reflect on what they know and when to provide opportunities for them to apply their learning to written or oral tasks, individually or in groups. Teachers plan their work effectively, although in mathematics insufficient thought is given to the balance of activities expected of pupils during lessons in Key Stages 3 and 4. Teachers mostly use a good variety of teaching methods and organise their grouping of pupils effectively. This is less effective, however, in the teaching of design and technology at Key Stage 3. Use of time and resources are well used except in mathematics at Key Stages 3 and 4 where the balance and pace of lessons is too restricted. Teachers generally make good use of day-to-day assessment. Homework is set regularly and purposefully but not always consistently. It is used mainly to extend existing learning or prepare for future work. As pupils move into Years 10, 11 and the sixth form suitable homework is set in preparation for the demands of examination courses. Despite the concerns of some parents, inspectors found this to be an entirely acceptable and useful practice. However, not all teachers gave sufficient significance to this homework at the start of this school year, being slow to mark it and some did not put it adequately in the context of future learning. However, day-by-day homework is set and marked appropriately except amongst a few teachers who do not consistently keep to the published homework timetable. This prevents those parents who wish to be supportive partners in their children's learning from being aware and able to help.

30. The school occasionally has pupils whose first language is not English and who need special tuition. A teacher of English as an additional language has been coming to the school on a part-time basis and has been successful in preparing pupils from countries such as Portugal and Thailand to a level where they are ready to enter GCSE examinations with reasonable expectations of success. One pupil has now moved into Year 12 to study A-Level courses. The school has valued this but further discussion is needed between management, the special needs coordinator and this teacher to make the most effective use of this particular provision.

31. Although the school succeeds in ensuring that a very high percentage of pupils pass public examinations, not as many pass at the highest levels as might be expected. The school does not seek to achieve an improvement in this area by increasing the number of examinations which pupils take. Instead it provides extension and enrichment provision which contains over 30 activities in the current year to motivate further those pupils and students capable of the highest attainment. These activities include residential courses for example in science and technology, a religious studies weekend, a Battle of Hastings re-enactment in Year 7, a geography visit to Europe in Year 8 and language exchanges, choirs, orchestra, dance workshops and the Young Enterprise Award. Some subjects, for example history, gain a higher percentage of top grades in GCSE and A-Level examinations. Other subjects, for example mathematics, do not and insufficient attention is paid in such instances to ascertain whether the methods of learning and teaching are extending those pupils capable of higher attainment. The school is now addressing the issue of getting the best possible levels of attainment from brighter pupils. In most subjects teachers expect pupils to do well but do not always expect the very best of them, especially those capable of the highest attainment. Lessons are not always planned with challenge in mind for different learning groups of pupils. Most teachers mark work regularly but the quality of marking is inconsistent across departments and within departments. Much of the marking is excellent and sets targets for improvement; some, however, is insufficiently thorough and there are some examples of cursory marking with little more than ticks.

32. Teachers do not always feel comfortable in using information technology to enhance learning. Some lack confidence in the use of computers. Where it is used successfully, IT is seen to motivate pupils and increase their pride in their work. Examples of such are seen in design and technology and history in Year 7 through to the presentation of assignments in the sixth form.

33. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is generally good at both key stages. At times it is very good and occasionally excellent. It is particularly good in the small additional English lessons in which the precise targets and varied methods are particularly effective. Although there is a shortage of books at present, the learning support assistants make valuable contributions to the quality of teaching. The increasing use of individual education plans and good assessment procedures are improving teaching. The excellent professional leadership is a decisive factor in the improvement of teaching pupils with special educational needs. Teachers generally take account of the information given to them about pupils on the special needs register. In most subjects the extra support teachers and small groupings help teaching. A common feature of all good teaching is where the class teachers plan and work closely with support assistants. This is especially so when the support assistants have appropriate expertise, for example in the use of IT. Some highly skilled teaching of pupils with specific learning difficulties is particularly effective. The detailed plans, which the special needs coordinator has produced to guide staff, have been instrumental in raising the school's consciousness about principles governing teaching pupils with special educational needs. At present there is too little emphasis on improving pupils' skills in numeracy; this is owing to the recent emphasis rightly being on the development of literacy skills. Teachers in all subjects are paying more attention to the development of literacy and numeracy skills amongst all pupils; such a focus can range from minimal attention to key technical terms to a thorough appraisal of the effectiveness of pupils' use of the written word, the understanding of subject-specific texts and ways in which number skills, when appropriate, are applied to learning situations. This fairly recent development is beginning to yield improvement in these areas amongst pupils across the range of attainment.

34. There is generally a good learning atmosphere in the school. Teachers enjoy a sense of humour that generates interest in learning. They respect pupils and are keen to see them succeed. Most are good at reinforcing past learning in order to progress towards new learning. When teachers work together, for example in the performing arts and drama at Key Stage 4, they effectively complement each other, are effective in managing group work purposefully and bring rigour to their teaching and pupils' learning. Such teachers are not insular in their approach to teaching. Pupils benefit from teachers learning from each other. Such professional commitment enhances the effectiveness of teachers. It is also mirrored in the amount of time many teachers give to a range of extra-curricular activities for pupils.

The curriculum and assessment

35. The curriculum and timetable have been revised since the previous inspection and the overall curricular provision is now very good. It is broad, balanced and relevant to the needs of pupils and students. It provides equally for girls and boys and pupils and students of different abilities. The curriculum fully meets the requirements

of the National Curriculum and the time given to teaching is above that recommended for each key stage. However, pupils in Key Stage 4 do not have a planned programme of information technology unless they take GCSE information systems.

36. The school provides a good programme of personal and social education. It is taught by all form teachers throughout the school and includes aspects of drugs and health education. From Year 7 onwards pupils are taught study skills, encouraged to record their achievements and learn how to evaluate their progress. The course is carefully planned, involves visiting speakers and is monitored to ensure consistency. The school has a clear policy statement on drugs misuse which gives clear guidance to staff on how to deal with drug related incidents.

37. The curricular provision for Key Stage 3 is very good. In addition to the National Curriculum subjects and religious education it includes drama, personal and social education and the majority of pupils take a second modern foreign language in Years 8 and 9. In Year 9 all pupils take physics, chemistry and biology.

38. In Key Stage 4 the curricular provision is good. Pupils take up to ten GCSE subjects. Most pupils will take English language and literature, mathematics, double science, design technology and a modern foreign language. There are three options which are carefully designed to encourage pupils to take one of the humanities subjects to ensure balance. For pupils who find ten GCSE subjects too much there is a very good range of additional studies - short, mainly practical courses which do not lead to GCSE certification. Some pupils take three separate sciences and a few take single science. Those taking three sciences nonetheless have a reasonably balanced curriculum although the overall numbers of pupils taking two or more modern foreign languages is low for a school with language college status. Time allocations for most subjects are close to national averages. However, the time given to design technology is less than that given to other GCSE subjects. That given to both religious and physical education is below the national average. The school has not yet taken the decision to introduce full GNVQ Part 1 courses at foundation level into the curriculum at Key Stage 4. This would provide more continuity and progression into the sixth form.

39. The sixth form curriculum is very good. Students are offered a wide range of A-Level subjects, GNVQ Advanced and Intermediate courses in Business and Manufacturing and there is a vocational course in Sport, Leisure and Recreation. A number of additional courses including personal and social education and careers, stage dance, short courses in modern foreign languages and physical education are part of a good enrichment programme. The new Lymm Award which includes religious education, key skills and general studies is very good. It is compulsory for all students. On entering the sixth form students hold discussions with teachers to determine that the courses of their choice are suitable development of their attainment at the end of Key Stage 4. Relationships with higher education are very good and during the sixth form years students have opportunities to sample the university environment. There is also a good programme of work experience; some students fulfil this with firms or organisations in mainland Europe. Sixth formers have the opportunity, sometimes linked to the key skills programme, of helping with younger pupils in some lessons, as part of the 'just ask me' programme, in the Year 7 induction programme at Ty'n-y-felin, as prefects and coaching in sports. They also help in the supervision of the school bank and in various enterprise activities. They also serve as prefects and support the performance programme of the performing arts department.

1. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4. All pupils with a low reading age have additional support in Key Stage 3. A few have literacy lessons instead of taking a second modern foreign language. Reading is further developed by Year 12 students working with pupils. This comprehensive provision in English is better than that in mathematics. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 needs to be reviewed to consider alternative patterns of study. The code of practice is fully implemented and all pupils, from stage 2 onwards, have individual education plans. These pupils receive effective additional support in the classroom and through withdrawal. These arrangements have a positive impact on progress and attainment.

41. Curricular planning is good in most subjects. However, in mathematics the schemes of work are incomplete and lack timing. In physical education they vary for the different activities. Lesson plans and schemes of work are generally carefully structured and enable continuity and progression from lesson to lesson, year to year and between the key stages. Planning for curricular continuity overall is very good. There are curricular links with primary schools and effective procedures for transition.

42. The provision of extra-curricular activities, including sport, is excellent. All subjects make a substantial contribution. Many pupils take part in educational visits abroad, residential activities at Ty'n-y-felin, productions and visits to theatres, art galleries and museums. An increasing number are involved in the Duke of Edinburgh Award. In sport there are inter-form and inter-school competitions and the school has the Sportsmark award. Sixteen sporting activities are provided and the participation rate of 40 per cent is high. In eight sports pupils have gained county and national representation. The work of teachers does much to broaden the pupils' experiences across a very wide range of activities.

43. Careers education is good and is well supported by the careers service. It begins in Year 9 with guidance and advice provided for all pupils on option choices. Pupils have the opportunity for two weeks of work experience in Year 10. Every two years there is a careers convention for pupils and their parents in Years 9 to 13. The careers library is very good and is used by many pupils and students at lunchtimes. In Key Stage 4 careers is taught for a short time in a carousel with religious and social education. Sex education is taught within various subjects but especially in religious and social education.

44. The procedures for assessment are good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form. The school has an assessment policy which achieves consistency of practice within and across most subjects except in physical education. This is a significant improvement since the previous inspection. Teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 are reliable and accurate especially in English, mathematics and science. Art and modern foreign languages tend to overestimate at the higher levels.

45. Pupils who have special educational needs benefit from the distinctive pattern of assessment at Key Stage 3. The testing system on entry enables teaching in the special needs department to be discriminating and diagnostic. These results are integrated into the individual education plans in which targets are set and reviewed each term. Ongoing tests aid the teaching progress.

46. The use of assessment data to inform curriculum planning and teaching is very good and a strength in almost all subjects. Within subjects it has identified weaknesses in the curriculum, teaching methods and materials which have subsequently been modified and improved. It is used to place pupils into sets and to determine entry to higher or foundation tiers at GCSE. Assessment provides information on the progress of pupils with special educational needs and assists in the modification of their learning programmes. Last year it was used to identify pupils at the grade C/D borderline who were then placed on a mentoring programme. The school feels that this was a very important factor in the improvement of the proportion of pupils with 5 or more A* to C grades. Assessment data is used to monitor the performance of all subjects in terms of GCSE and A-Level results. It is used by the school to set the statutory targets for future performance. Assessment now has a direct and positive impact on teaching, progress and attainment.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

47. The school has sustained the high standard of provision for pupils' personal development which was reported in the previous inspection. This was also the view of parents who responded to the pre inspection questionnaire and attended the meeting with the registered inspector. Overall provision is very good.

48. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is good. The programme of themes for assemblies and "thought for the day" is well planned and provides some opportunities for pupils to be involved in preparing and leading these occasions. Regular productive liaison exists with local clergy who are welcomed into school on a regular basis to lead assemblies and worship. Founders' Day and Christmas are marked with special services in the local Anglican parish church. An additional opportunity for suitable personal reflection and worship is provided in form time for each tutor group on a half termly basis and one such occasion which was observed during the inspection was of good quality. Assemblies are also used to reinforce the school's aims and values. Year 12 students produced an impressive thought provoking musical and dramatic performance on the theme of bullying for pupils in Year 7. A Christian Union group meets regularly and is well attended. Unfortunately, despite the school's best efforts, inconsistencies in the application of its policy mean that the legal requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils is not always met, which was also the case at the time of the previous inspection. Religious education makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual development, not least by considering the relevance of religious teaching in their own lives, by evaluating a range of moral and religious issues and in considering difficult

questions such as the existence of suffering in the world. Art enables pupils to experience the spiritual impact of beauty and imaginative, reflective original writing is a strength in English.

49. There is very good provision for moral development. Expectations of attitudes and behaviour are consistently applied and teachers are good role models. Shared values are reinforced in assemblies. For example, pupils in Year 9 consider the extent to which notable figures of the twentieth century can be considered to be forces for good or evil and reflect on their own influence on the people around them. Sex education is taught with due regard for moral considerations and the value of family life. Most subjects deal with moral issues and reinforce shared values. For example, physical education encourages fair play and very good sporting attitudes. The testimony of a survivor of the Holocaust provides a unique inspiration each year for related work in both history and religious education. Religious and social education deals with a range of moral issues and equips pupils to take part in well informed debate on topics such as substance abuse. Environmental issues are dealt with in geography and history looks at morality of warfare and issues such as slavery.

50. Provision for social development is also very good. The school is committed to developing responsible attitudes, social skills and positive personal relationships in its pupils. Here again the staff show a positive lead to pupils in fund raising through an annual pantomime production. The majority of subjects provide opportunities for pupils to work cooperatively and collaboratively in a variety of social settings and pupils' contributions to lessons are valued. Older pupils and students studying physical education work extensively in local primary schools or with younger pupils in the school. Team building is a feature of the residential experience provided for all pupils in Year 7 and a wide range of other visits also support social development. Pupils have real opportunities to accept responsibility and demonstrate their initiative through the school council, by acting as prefects and by their involvement in extensive fund raising for local and national charities. Year 11 pupils produce a Christmas concert for local elderly people

51. There is good provision for pupils' cultural development although, as at the previous inspection, this is stronger in terms of British and other European cultures with only limited opportunities to experience and appreciate the richness of cultural diversity beyond Europe. There are numerous opportunities for pupils to be involved in extra curricular activities. There is an extensive variety of musical ensembles and regular productions such as the current "Bugsy Malone". Sport is a particular strength. There are strong links with partner schools in Europe including opportunities for work experience. Religious education, history and art provide some awareness and experience of cultural diversity. Geography capitalises on the availability of a native Japanese speaker to provide a unique insight into the Japanese way of life as well as a view of Britain from a Japanese perspective. There is a good programme of curricular-related visits and holidays abroad.

52. Pupils with special educational needs generally share the common experiences of all pupils. There is no focused attention as to their particular requirements in their spiritual development. The small class groups and additional-teacher support help them in their moral and social development. It is particularly evident that improvements in reading have a marked effect on the social development of pupils. The lunchtime club which has two support assistants to help pupils is very effective in providing social support as well as providing additional opportunities for school work.

40. Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

53. The school has a very good development and welfare system. There are effective induction procedures for Year 7, who settle quickly into school routines. The residential visit to Ty'n y Felin early in their first term helps to establish good relationships. Parents and pupils express confidence in the support and guidance at the school.

54. The procedures to monitor academic progress have been improved since the previous inspection and are now very good. The faculties use the assessment data to identify any under-achievers. In the last year about 40 pupils on the C/D grade GCSE borderline were identified and given specialist mentoring. This successfully raised attainment. Pupils feel well informed of their progress by these procedures and by informative marking and the written reports. Parents are rapidly gaining confidence in the school's ability to meet the requirements of pupils with special educational needs.

55. Pupils' behaviour is monitored well. Discipline and behaviour is good. The school employs good strategies to

support pupils and improve their motivation and self esteem. Support is complemented effectively by external support agencies including the local education authority's behaviour support team and Youth for Christ Worker. Pupils with identified special educational needs are well supported. The yellow card referral system works effectively to discourage poor behaviour. The achievement award system is effective, particularly in Year 7, and recognises and rewards good behaviour and attitudes.

56. Procedures to ensure good attendance are satisfactory and meet statutory requirements. Heads of year monitor attendance effectively and the educational welfare officer gives the school good support.

57. The school has a comprehensive health and safety policy, which is implemented well. There are no major outstanding issues. The school has conducted risk assessments in most departments, but not all have formal written assessments. There is good provision for first aid and suitable records are maintained on medical conditions. Procedures for child protection are secure.

58. At the time of the previous inspection provision for pupils' support, guidance and welfare was described as 'secure and effective'; it is currently an equally effective aspect of the school's provision as it was in 1994.

40.

40. **Partnership with parents and the community**

59. The overall quality of the school's relationship with parents and the community is good. This reflects the judgements made at the time of the previous inspection. The school is a popular choice with parents. The home/school partnership is very effective. Parents' strong backing for the school's values and the education it provides has a very positive influence on the standards achieved.

60. A large proportion of parents completed the pre-inspection questionnaire, many taking the opportunity to write detailed comments to the inspectors. This reflects their active interest. Parents' views were overwhelmingly positive and raised few significant issues. Minor concerns were expressed about homework, particularly for Year 10 in the summer holidays, overcrowding in the sixth form and information on pupils' work. In the light of parents' comments, the school is refining the homework for Year 10. The inspectors agree that there is some overcrowding in the sixth form. This does affect some social facilities, but it does not impact upon standards. The inspectors consider that the school provides good information on work. Assessment and curricular booklets are provided and the school holds an open evening in each academic year.

61. A parent and teacher association gives very good support to the school. It is currently sponsoring netball and cricket to a significant sum. Parents also help in practical ways, for example in restoring the cricket pavilion, helping with the pantomime and with extra-curricular sport.

62. The school sends out good written information. The procedures to report upon pupils' progress have been successfully improved since the previous inspection. The annual written reports present a suitably individual picture of the child's progress and attainment against clear criteria. The interim matrix report is succinct and useful. Students in vocational education studies produce a newsletter which helps to inform parents about school life.

63. Curricular links with primary schools have been developed since the previous inspection. They are now very good. Years 7 and 6 pupils work on an excellent linked science project 'Bubbles'.

64. There are constructive links with the local community. Sixth formers participate in the Lymm Award which has a strong community dimension. They also benefit from the opportunities for work experience abroad in Germany and Holland. The Comenius project links pupils with schools in Italy and Germany.

65. The school has a good partnership with industry. Year 10 pupils benefit from the support of local industry for their two weeks of work experience. Local employers support the schools' annual Industry day. There are excellent industrial links with manufacturing companies, which strengthen the GNVQ courses. Local industrialists advise the Young Enterprise group in Year 12, others help students following the Lymm Award by leading teambuilding exercises and practice in interview techniques, which helps them prepare for higher education or the world of work.

40.

THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

40. **Leadership and management**

66. Very good leadership by the headteacher gives a good direction and purpose to the school. In the last eighteen months this has had a primary focus on raising attainment. Early analysis by the headteacher, soon after his recent appointment to the school, identified areas of underachievement. In 1999 the results of this focus were seen; there was a marked improvement in results in GCSE examinations and a small improvement in A-Level results.

67. A new management structure has been put in place since the previous inspection. At that time the management of the school was deemed to be successful but it is the judgement of the current inspection that leadership and management of the school currently are even more successful owing to the improvements that have been made in pupils' overall attainment. There remain areas of underachievement, especially in the proportion of pupils at GCSE and A-Level who are not achieving the higher grades. The headship team recognises this, sees its link to some teaching being insufficiently challenging. In this school attainment, progress and teaching are all consistently good, although not sufficiently very good. However, this high level of consistency in the different facets of the school's work is an indication of the effectiveness of the management style and systems that exist. As a result the school is

building into its developmental planning a more rigorous programme of support for teaching through a varied pattern of monitoring of lessons and the design of the curriculum in some subjects. At present such monitoring is not systematic enough to be fully effective. In this work the headteacher brings a very clear vision of how this good school can become even better. He is keen that all pupils and sixth form students will strive for success at the highest level appropriate to them. He is seeking to raise further the expectations of teachers. This vision is one to which the headship team and governors have become parties; a strength of the school is its sense of shared endeavour. An example of this is the recent expansion of support staff to ease some of the administrative load of teachers in order that their energies can be directed fully to providing pupils with an effective learning programme.

68. The headteacher's management of the school is very good; in a short period of time he has sensitively developed professional relationships with all those who work in or support the school, giving a clear focus for the future development of the school. As a result he has established the ethos of an improving school. It has made significant improvements since the previous inspection in 1994, even though that inspection, too, found it to be a good school. The school is increasing in popularity, the sixth form is expanding significantly and further accommodation is needed to house a larger intake at Year 7. Teaching has improved since the previous inspection. At that time nine per cent of teaching was unsatisfactory and now only just over one per cent of unsatisfactory teaching is seen. In 1994 only just over half of teaching was good or better, now nearly three-quarters of all teaching falls into this category. The school now uses statistics of pupils' achievement more effectively, evolving the principle of minimum expected grades (MEGs) sensibly to track whether pupils are in line to fulfil their potential. Efforts have begun to raise further the attainment of higher-attaining pupils. The school has begun, therefore, to agree with pupils and parents, pupils' own individual targets. Mentoring programmes support this push for continually rising standards. Individual departments are more accountable for the performance of pupils.

69. The governing body is active and well informed. In addition to an effective and efficient bringing of the school to account through its work in committees, most governors commit themselves in direct ways to the life of the school. For example, they help staff the school's educational visits, help with invigilation of examinations and, by such means, ensure that members of staff are supported and able to concentrate on teaching and learning. Governors take steps to be informed about the teaching and learning in the school. They mirror members of the headship team in being linked to areas of the curriculum. As far as their other commitments allow they are building close relationships with their assigned departments, some contributing areas of their own expertise at departmental meetings. They have been involved with the management of the school in setting the school's required statutory targets, ensuring that these are challenging but achievable. The governing body fulfils most of its statutory obligations.

70. The management of the school through its governing body has established effective developmental planning. There is a three-year school development plan that is clear and precise in setting out necessary and achievable goals. This is represented each year by a management, or action, plan based on the goals of the development plan. It is about ensuring that planned improvements actually happen. Its emphasis is on raising attainment and its targets are clear. Each subject department sets out its own agenda for improvement in relation to the overall vision of the development plan. The successful implementation of the developmental planning is monitored through the cycle of management meetings. The chair of the governing body is involved at first hand in this process as a co-opted member of the headship team.

71. Management of the subject departments is generally good. Some departments operate within a structure of six faculties. This can encourage shared activities, for example fieldwork in the humanities faculty and shared teaching in the performing arts. Provision for pupils with special needs has improved markedly since the previous inspection. This has resulted in the needs of pupils with special needs being fully integrated into the school's policy to enhance learning for all. The coordinator works closely with staff from all departments to ensure that the education of pupils with special needs is always given full consideration. The school's special needs policy has been clearly formulated and is being implemented. Resources of personnel and time are well deployed and the philosophy of the department is in keeping with the stated aims of the school.

72. Heads of key stage and of year play a significant role in the school's striving to maintain an ethos of rising standards. There is no rigid divide between pastoral and academic responsibilities, the two aspects of personal growth being seen as intertwined. The outcome of this is that a very effective network of monitoring pupils' overall progress and attainment is established. This will be enhanced shortly through the introduction of an appropriate computer program. At present, however, insufficient thought is sometimes given to raising the overall performance

of all pupils so that the school's average points scores at GCSE and A-Level increase, rather than concentrating just on improving the percentage of passes at each threshold identified in the published statistics of examinations.

73. Governors have not ensured: that the school includes a daily collective act of worship; that the provision of information technology at Key Stage 4 meets the requirements of the National Curriculum.

40. **Staffing, accommodation and learning resources**

74. Provision overall is good.

75. As at the time of the previous inspection, the school has a good match of number, qualification and experience of teachers to the needs of the curriculum and the ages and abilities of the pupils. The balance of teachers' extensive experience and more recent qualification results in good teaching and high standards in many subjects. The provision of non-teaching staff is good overall. The recent increase in administrative staff allows teachers more time to focus on teaching. For example, the special educational needs coordinator is provided with twenty-five hours of administrative support each week. The coordinator is freed from routine administration and is able to focus on ensuring a high quality of provision for pupils with special educational needs. The two specialist teachers of pupils with special educational needs are highly skilled and very well qualified. The coordinator of special needs in particular can draw upon considerable experience and expertise to solve problems. The presence of four modern foreign language assistants, additional technical support and a marketing manager ensures that pupils achieve high standards in languages. The support assistants are all effective and are becoming increasingly better qualified as they are encouraged to attend professional courses.

76. The school's arrangements for professional development are good overall and have a positive effect on improving the quality of the teaching. The school has recently been re-assessed and recognised as an Investor in People for a second time. Professional development planning is linked to school and subject development priorities and the appraisal process. Non-teaching staff are included. Priorities include the improvement of teaching and learning, literacy across the school and further development of information technology skills.

77. Procedures for the induction of newly qualified teachers and teachers who are new to the school are effective and meet DFEE recommendations. The school provides mentors and placements for associate teachers during their initial teacher training for a number of local colleges and universities.

78. The accommodation is good overall and has improved since the previous inspection. A new purpose built language centre opened in November 1997 as a result of the school receiving language college status. Eight spacious well-equipped classrooms, a multi-media room and a flexible learning area are helping the faculty to develop towards the consistent achievement of high standards. Mobile classrooms have been refurbished but they are still too small to accommodate large language groups. There is sufficient specialist accommodation for most subjects. However, there is no drama studio or a suitable floor for dance and lessons are taught in the hall or a partially-adapted area in the leisure centre. Some science lessons are taught out of laboratories and there is a lack of a technology or graphics room. The school has plans to extend the outdoor facilities for physical education to provide more netball courts, soccer pitches and cricket wickets.

79. Much of the accommodation is of a good quality. Very good display enhances the quality of the working spaces in a number of subjects. The school is carpeted in many areas. Classrooms are well equipped with whiteboards and good quality furniture and windows have blinds. The sixth form continues to expand beyond the limits of the accommodation provided. Study areas are limited and social spaces are cramped. The school has plans to build new facilities for sixth form students and extend the provision for the performing arts. Access to some parts of the building remains limited for people with physical or visual difficulties.

80. The provision of resources is good. The provision of textbooks for every pupil in most subjects helps pupils to make good progress. There is plenty of audio-visual equipment available and used to enhance teaching and learning. The provision of computers is average at 9.4 pupils for every computer. Many subjects, for example science and languages, make good use of computers to support learning. However many of the computers are out-of-date and access to them is limited in some subjects such as art, design and technology and music. There is no facility for teachers to project the computer screen and this limits teachers' opportunities to demonstrate. A range of improved

resources has been acquired over the past year but better reading books and equipment for activities are barely adequate. The mathematics faculty has inadequate resources for pupils with special educational needs.

81. The previous inspection report indicated that the school was in the process of developing its learning resource centre. Although there have been some significant improvements in the last few years and the group of rooms which are used as the centre are attractive and welcoming, they are small and rather cramped, especially for the sixth form; it is difficult to monitor and supervise their use by pupils. The stock of books has been increased and improved, although it is still difficult to provide a sufficient variety of materials for such a large sixth form from the monies provided. The fiction sections are attractive and up to date; the stock is enhanced by newspapers, some periodicals and journals, a cuttings collection as well as computers and CD Roms although there are no audio and video libraries. Subscription to a schools' library service of another local authority provides good project collections for use in a range of subjects and these are well used. The centre is efficiently managed by a qualified librarian, a library assistant and pupil librarians who give generously of their time. Pupils are inducted into the procedures and practices of the centre in Year 7. The centre's resources are well used during the day and at breaks and lunchtimes; use and borrowing figures are evaluated and reported regularly. The centre's resources are not available to pupils after school. Although most departments make some use of the centre's facilities, there is no formal means by which the centre can plan to serve and support the development of the curriculum.

40.

40. **The efficiency of the school**

82. Systems for financial planning are good. Basic income per pupil is below average, even taking account of the extra funding which the school receives as a designated language college. Hence, the compilation of the annual budget and its administration require and receive a great deal of care and attention to detail. Budget elements are planned carefully each year using accurate historical data and most of the current allocated proportions of the total annual expenditure in the main school budget are broadly average compared with other schools nationally. The exception is the proportion of budget spent on educational resources, where careful planning is designed to improve the quality of the programme for the pupils.

83. Recent planning for increasing the efficiency of the school as a whole is very good. A redistribution of part of the staffing budget has led to greater efficiency in terms of communication and management. A flatter senior management structure has been instituted together with newly designated subject faculties. The school has at the same time planned to increase the proportion of the budget spent on clerical assistance to make better use of teachers' time. The net result of these changes is a system which has far more cohesion, and which has sufficient administration assistance to keep information flows running smoothly.

84. The large sixth form uses slightly less of the school's overall staffing resources than it might do in terms of the proportion of income which the school receives specifically for the sixth form. However, this small subsidy to the main school is justified by the mutual benefits felt by the school and its sixth form where areas of support and social activities overlap. The sixth form gives good value for money.

85. Development planning, which was criticised in the previous inspection, has been strengthened, and is now very good. Subject and project plans inform the whole school plan in terms of cost, timescale, person responsible, and evaluation procedure. The development plan for the language college links costed budget elements to outcomes in terms of examination results. However, the budget for this part of the school's development although well-planned in general financial terms, lacks the same high quality precision, which characterises the rest of the school's financial planning.

86. Financial control and school administration are very good. Expenditure is monitored carefully by the school's finance manager and by the governors. Areas of concern, such as the amount spent on supply teacher cover, are fully investigated, and prudent attempts are made to reduce spending wherever feasible. The business manager provides the headship team and governors with good financial information, both frequently and regularly. Hence good control of spending is achieved, and variances are fully investigated. The quality of this information could be enhanced by a written commentary, alerting readers to anomalies and areas of concern within the figures prior to finance meetings.

87. Administration staff are well-managed, and perform their tasks efficiently, keeping the required information flows running smoothly, dealing with orders and invoices carefully, and keeping records up to date. The school office gives a very purposeful and thoroughly professional impression. It acts as the first point of contact for parents and

visitors, and provides the school with a welcoming and efficient reception area.

88. The deployment of the school's teaching and support staff is good. Lessons are taught by teachers, who have sufficient knowledge of their subjects to promote at least adequate, and normally good or very good progress. Office staff, technical support staff, and classroom assistants all play vital roles in the effective education of the pupils. Managers generally have sufficient time to meet their responsibilities effectively, and the organisation of the pupils' learning across the curriculum is good. Resources and accommodation are used effectively to promote pupils' progress. However, as at the time of the previous inspection, some lessons start too late. Ten minutes lost at the start of a one hour lesson is not uncommon, and is due to the late arrival of pupils from the previous subject. This loss of teaching time affects rates of progress.

89. The school gives good value for money as it did at the time of the previous inspection. The education programme is of a good standard. Unit costs are below average, but outputs are good in terms of pupils' attitudes to learning and the amounts of progress which they make.

40. **PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS**

40. **ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE**

40. **English**

90. Rates of progress are satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form and good in Key Stage 4. This reflects the good attitudes brought to their learning by pupils and the quality of teaching at each key stage. Levels of attainment are, therefore, well above average overall, being well above in Key Stages 3 and 4 and average in the sixth form in relation to the demands of the A-Level examination.

91. Overall, pupils' attainment in national tests and examinations is well above average. Both boys and girls in the last two years have been equally successful in the tests taken at the end of Year 9 which assess some specific elements of the National Curriculum: just over a quarter attained level 7, just over half attained level 6 and almost all attained level 5. The national target is between level 5 and level 6. In 1999 the Key Stage 3 results were well above average in relation to all schools as well as those with similar intakes. Results in these tests have improved steadily over recent years and since the previous inspection. Virtually all the Year 11 pupils in the last two years have attained A*-G grades in both GCSE English and English literature. The quality of the GCSE results improved between 1998 and 1999, so that about three-quarters of the pupils gained A*-C grades in both subjects. Whilst girls outperform boys in GCSE, the overall proportion of pupils who gained A*/A grades in 1999 was double the national figure in English and three times the national figure in English literature. English results have improved steadily and the subject has performed to similar levels to most other subjects in the school. Results in the GCSE examination in media studies are well above the national average. All students entered for A-Level English language and English literature in the last two years have secured pass grades. The proportion who achieved the higher A and B grades was average in the language course in both years; the proportion of those attaining the higher two grades in the literature course was above average in 1998 and well above average in 1999.

92. Standardised tests show that the majority of pupils enter the school with standards of reading and writing which are well above the national average. There is a relatively small proportion of lower attainers or pupils who have particular difficulties with literacy. These pupils make good progress; they have some additional support as well as secure access to the curriculum and to a variety of ways of learning. They are generally well taught in small groups by experienced teachers. Inspection findings, which are based on a broader base of evidence than tests and examinations, indicate that the majority of pupils in Key Stage 3 build systematically on their previous learning and make satisfactory progress in response to largely satisfactory teaching of a carefully planned curriculum. They continue to develop their language skills at a satisfactory rate, so that attainment is well above average at the end of the key stage, as confirmed by the national test results. Pupils are very thoroughly and rigorously prepared for all aspects of their GCSE examination courses; a larger proportion of the teaching is good in Key Stage 4 and the writing skills of pupils of all abilities improve considerably in Years 10 and 11. Whilst the attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is well above average overall, the quality and depth of both written work and the development of critical reading skills results in the majority of pupils making good progress overall. This is borne out by the high proportion of pupils who gain the top grades in the GCSE examinations. The majority of students studying for A-Level courses make progress at a satisfactory rate; while the highest attainers produce work of a very high quality; attainment overall on both courses is broadly average.

93. Pupils develop their skills of speaking and listening at a satisfactory rate in Key Stages 3 and 4. Many volunteer answers to teachers' questions and answers are fluent and quite extended, so that reasons and evidence are cited to support their points of view. Most use informal talk well in pairs and groups to discuss and negotiate ideas and provide well-informed feedback to their teachers. Very few activities were observed during the inspection which required pupils to adapt and adjust their speech to different circumstances and audiences or to take part in role play or produce speech of any length; discussions with pupils and some oral records show that these take place at other times of the year.

94. The small number of pupils who have difficulties with reading are given specific help and they accelerate their progress during Key Stages 3 and 4 so that virtually all can cope with the demands of GCSE courses. Pupils encounter a good range of literary texts in both key stages. These include teenage novels in Key Stage 3 as well as some pre-twentieth century texts and introductions to the plays of Shakespeare. Written work shows they have a

good grasp of plot, characterisation and themes of the texts they study; some enjoy private reading for pleasure and the department works hard to promote pupils' interest and commitment to reading through events centred on the learning resource centre. They also successfully undertake research reading which requires pupils to use a range of non-fiction texts in order to extract and compare sources of information. One of the major sources of the increased rate of progress in Key Stage 4 is a systematic attention to the development of pupils' critical reading skills provided by the teaching. In this key stage pupils encounter a good range of demanding texts; the very thorough teaching of the examination board's anthology, especially its wide range of poetry, augments the study of a good range of novels and plays. As a result, pupils of all abilities respond positively to this detailed work and learn to comment extensively and with considerable skill on the effects of the language which writers use.

95. Pupils' improvement in the skills of writing underpins their success in the GCSE examinations. In Key Stage 3, pupils learn to write in a full range of forms and styles and they recognise the links made with their reading. Much of the original writing in both key stages is mature and imaginative and shows good control of a range of genres. Almost all pupils in Key Stage 3 produce extended pieces of writing; a significant minority make errors of spelling and punctuation in writing which in other ways has considerable merit and is lively and thoughtful. However, the teaching requires that pupils in all years work hard to redraft and edit their work so that the quality of writing improves considerably in Key Stage 4 when it is combined with an emphasis on approaching texts critically. Almost all pupils in this key stage write well-developed, thorough GCSE assignments; those of the higher attainers are lengthy, accurate and well-structured with clear introductions and conclusions which show that they can argue a case and marshal evidence to support it. Sixth formers write clear, conscientious notes, commentaries and essays and the best writing is mature and analytical as well as showing considerable insight into the texts studied.

96. Pupils' attitudes to their work are good overall. Their sensible, positive and settled approaches to work, in response to largely well-organised and carefully planned teaching, enable them to make good use of their time and to participate well in lessons. They concentrate and persevere and are mostly well-motivated, accepting the guidance of their teachers. They show some initiative when working in groups and pairs for short periods, but are rarely required to work independently. Many work hard at home to consolidate their learning in school.

97. The quality of teaching is good overall and has very good features in a small number of lessons; it is most consistent and effective in Key Stage 4 and generally satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form. Teaching is not monitored and supported often enough for good practice to be shared and satisfactory teaching to be improved to that which is good or very good. The two unsatisfactory lessons were insufficiently planned, lacked structure and a variety of activities to motivate and stimulate the progress of able pupils. Usually, however, units of work and individual lessons are effectively planned and the good teaching is well informed, makes high demands of pupils' concentration and commitment and provides a range of activities and groupings to help pupils tackle demanding texts and develop skills, including the annotation and critical interpretation of a range of such texts. For example, a mixed ability Year 7 class worked with considerable enthusiasm and commitment in a study of 'The Tempest' to consolidate an understanding of the plot, characterisation and setting of the play in a lesson which required them to extract information about the island from both written and moving image texts. The lesson, which was exceptionally well planned, used a series of activities of increasing difficulty, interspersed with lively questioning and discussion; as a result, pupils made progress at a fast rate. Similarly, a middle ability Year 10 group enjoyed performing a poem they were studying from the examination anthology; the insights they gained from the activity in which every member of the class was involved, helped them to then work quickly in groups to record brief notes on the imagery and to recognise its patterns and effects. The range of well-organised activities, supported by challenging questioning by the teacher and good resources made the lesson both enjoyable and demanding. In the lessons which are satisfactory but not better, the teaching is well-informed and often supported by good prompts and printed materials, but uses a narrower range of activities and groupings; the pace is slower and pupils are more dependent on the input of their teachers, so that less is achieved in the time available.

98. The English faculty and its large team of teachers are well managed. Examination and test results as well as the proportion of good teaching have improved considerably since the previous inspection. Pupils' work is exceptionally well marked and consistently assessed so that pupils are given valuable feedback and provided with clear guidance for future improvement. Accommodation is of a high standard; pupils' work and other materials are effectively displayed in the rooms and corridors to provide a strong subject identity and to reinforce pupils' achievements. Overall levels of attainment are better than in 1994 when results were described as 'slightly above' national average whilst now they are well above at the end of Key Stage 3 and at GCSE level. Results at A-Level are much the same

as in 1994. Priorities for the future include: the consistent use of a full range of oral activities; increased dissemination of effective teaching strategies; consideration of the implications of the National Literacy Strategy for the Year 7 curriculum; improve levels of attainment in the sixth form, building more on attainment at the end of Key Stage 4.

Key Skills : speaking, listening, reading and writing across the curriculum:

99. Pupils enter the school with standards of reading and writing which are well above average. Standards of literacy and talk are consistently of a high standard in Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form; they contribute significantly to pupils' high levels of attainment in most areas of the curriculum. Pupils' writing skills in Key Stage 4 are a particular strength.

100. The previous inspection report acknowledged the high quality of pupils' language skills, but indicated that pupils in Key Stage 3 were better at using informal talk in pairs and groups than contributing to class discussions. This aspect has now improved so that pupils are equally confident, fluent and often articulate in both contexts. Pupils of all ages and abilities express themselves confidently and clearly in a range of groupings and activities; a good proportion are very articulate. In most subjects pupils discuss ideas in order to clarify meanings and understanding and to consolidate their learning. Pupils readily offer their opinions, usually supported by reasons and evidence, they respond especially well to the opportunities provided in history and geography lessons to debate issues and take part in simulations and some role play. A significant proportion speak the wide range of foreign languages they study confidently and accurately. Most pupils and students are attentive and considerate listeners to their teachers and peers.

101. The vast majority of pupils read their course books, printed materials and information in electronic form with understanding. They encounter a wide range of reading materials in most subjects and show assured skills in locating and extracting information as well as comparing sources. The ability to read closely and carefully is well developed in English lessons. The small minority of pupils who have difficulties with reading are supported successfully in a range of contexts and make good progress in both key stages so that they cope well with their GCSE courses.

102. Pupils' writing skills are well developed and most are confident writers. Overall, pupils show considerable care, effort and commitment to present their work well. Most, including lower attainers, write continuously in a full range of subjects. There is little evidence of copying although some younger pupils who produce lively, continuous writing with good control of the content make careless spelling errors. Many pupils in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, and to some extent in Key Stage 3, undertake extended writing in the form of fieldwork, projects, coursework and investigations, successfully organising, analysing and interpreting evidence and data. Pupils are also adept at using writing to support their thinking and planning so that they can take and make notes with considerable success. In a range of subjects and especially during GCSE courses, pupils revise and edit their first attempts to improve content and accuracy. Pupils write in a range of forms and for a variety of purposes in most subjects, including imaginative and discursive work, essays, notes, descriptions, observations and analysis. Written work of outstanding quality was observed in art, English, geography, history and science. The school is in a good position to consolidate and develop further the key aspects of its recently-developed literacy policy.

Mathematics

103. Test and examination results improved in 1999 from those of 1998. Attainment in the end of Key Stage 3 tests was well above average for all schools in 1998, and similar in 1999. There was a small rise in the proportion of pupils achieving National Curriculum levels 5 and 6 between 1998 and 1999. Boys tended to produce better results. GCSE results in the range A*-C were above average for the country as a whole in 1998, and rose steeply to well above average in 1999. Girls achieved generally better results in both years. GCSE results in the sixth form are good. A-Level results were below the national average in 1998 in terms of the proportion of the entry achieving the higher grades A and B and pass grades A to E. Results improved considerably in 1999 and matched the national average for both higher and pass grades.

104. Pupils enter the school with a profile of attainment which is well above average. The satisfactory progress made by each cohort of pupils as they pass through the school results in attainment being maintained at a well above average level up to the ends of Key Stages 3 and 4. Results in the end of Key Stage 3 tests and GCSE examinations

confirm the standards in the classroom; standards of attainment in these examinations are also well above average compared with all schools. The Key Stage 3 results are average compared with schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. Standards in the sixth form are average in relation to the requirements of the A-Level course and progress overall is good.

105. In the sixth form, despite attainment being average rather than better in relation to A-Level requirements, the progress made by students is good because of their positive attitudes, attendance and teaching which is more consistently good than in Key Stages 3 and 4.

106. Courses are structured well; they allow pupils of all ages and all levels of attainment to consolidate their learning, and develop skills and understanding in the subject at an appropriate rate. Teaching is of an overall satisfactory standard so pupils generally make progress at expected rates. Progress is good in several of the higher sets in Key Stages 3 and 4, and in the A-Level classes because the combination of the quality of teaching and pupils' attitudes are better than in many middle and lower groups. The teaching provided for pupils in sets five and six in Year 11 is also strong and leads to pupils achieving their potential.

107. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils in the highest set are demonstrating well above average levels of skill and understanding. They are confident with circle calculations, cumulative frequency, index notation, ratio, and algebraic equations involving brackets. Lower-attaining pupils demonstrate broadly average attainment. Most pupils can carry out an investigation with the teacher's help, and many are able to deduce the rule governing the patterns of results which they have obtained.

108. At the end of Key Stage 4, pupils in the highest groups answer most questions on a higher tier GCSE practice paper with suitable speed and accuracy. Some are already demonstrating attainment at the highest point of the GCSE range. There are ten teaching sets in Year 11, and even in sets six and seven, pupils are showing the capability to achieve within the higher GCSE range of grades. They are confident with many topics at levels 5 and 6 of the National Curriculum but begin to struggle with algebraic equations involving the removal of brackets and other topics such as simultaneous equations. Pupils in the lowest group are on course to achieve a GCSE pass grade. Their coursework is of a standard equivalent to the achievement of grades in the range E to G. Many GCSE pupils in the sixth form, who are taking mathematics again to improve their grades, show improved knowledge and understanding. A-Level students in Year 13 demonstrate attainment relative to the full range of grades A to E, their overall level of attainment being around grade C.

109. Pupils in higher sets in Key Stages 3 and 4 relate equally well to questions posed in mathematical symbols, problem-solving investigations or a mixture of both. However, pupils in middle and lower-attaining groups are more confident with exercises of skills out of context. They are far less confident with questions posed wholly or partly in text. When presented with this sort of work, instead of settling to think and find their way towards solutions, there is a tendency to ask peers or the teacher for help too quickly.

110. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress as they move through the school. Their courses are appropriate, and where possible, they are given extra assistance in the classroom to help them achieve success at a suitable level. Most special needs pupils achieve pass grades at GCSE.

111. Whilst the majority of pupils make satisfactory progress in lessons and over time in mathematics, there is nevertheless some underachievement in Key Stages 3 and 4. In a minority of lessons the teaching is only just satisfactory; it is not strong enough to ensure that all pupils learn sufficiently quickly. Hence the concerns of a small but significant number of parents are justified. In these lessons some pupils tend to waste time and disturb the concentration of others.

112. Progress in A-Level courses is good because the teaching is well focussed on the demands of the examination. Students receive good assessments of their work so that they know what to do to improve. Individual help from the teacher plays an important role in the progress which all A-Level students make. Relationships in the classrooms are good and learning occurs at a brisk pace for students of all levels of attainment.

113. Teaching is satisfactory overall: it is satisfactory in Key Stages 3 and 4, and good in the sixth form. In Key Stage 3, teaching is almost always satisfactory or better, and in a quarter of lessons it is good or very good. One unsatisfactory lesson was observed during the inspection. In Key Stage 4, teaching is always at least satisfactory,

and in a third of lessons it is good. A-Level teaching is always good. In Key Stages 3 and 4 there is a significant proportion of teaching, which is only just satisfactory. Teachers' expectations and their use of assessment are normally good. Their knowledge and understanding are satisfactory, as are the methods and organisation in the classroom and the use of homework. Generally the management of pupils is good, but there are instances of less than full control of the amount of chatter in class. This causes pupils to lose concentration and slows the pace of their work. There are wide variations in the quality of the planning of lessons and in the utilisation of lesson time. The variation is from very good to unsatisfactory. Many lessons begin with an adequate exposition by the teacher followed by a long period of answering questions on paper. During the written work, pupils often lose concentration and interest, and begin to waste time. For many pupils, this type of lesson structure is inappropriate because they cannot maintain sufficient concentration. Time targets are rarely set for exercises and often pupils leave the classroom without knowing whether their work is correct or not. Some pupils' exercise books are not marked at all either by the pupils themselves or the teacher. The usefulness of this work for subsequent revision for examinations is, therefore, reduced. There are few opportunities provided for teachers to learn from each other through mutual monitoring and support. Teachers display pupils' work in the suites of rooms allocated to the subject. The work is of a good standard but the quality of presentation of the displays is inferior to that found in other areas of the school.

114. As at the time of the previous inspection, pupils' attitudes are usually positive. In many classes there is concentrated listening to the teacher followed by thoroughly focussed written work. Pupils are courteous and behave well. They enjoy good relationships with their teachers, who will really put themselves out to help them improve their learning and understanding. They normally present written work well. In a minority of lessons, there is too much distracting chatter, and the work of some pupils is insufficiently well set out. Too often in Key Stage 4, working for problems is not shown. The generally good attitudes displayed by the majority of pupils, linked to their good attendance at school help to promote learning. However, quite often pupils take too long to arrive at mathematics lessons from the previous subject; they can be as much as ten minutes late. This uses up valuable lesson time and slows progress.

115. The mathematics programme is well organised, and teachers put much energy into ensuring that pupils of all levels of attainment achieve good results. Almost every pupil in Key Stage 4 achieves a GCSE grade in the range A*-G. This is better than the position nationally. Despite lapses in marking, overall assessment in the subject is good and plays an important part in the monitoring of progress of individuals and whole classes.

Key Skills: the use of numeracy across the curriculum:

116. Pupils' numeracy skills are well above average and pupils use them effectively in their work in many subjects across the curriculum. Calculators are used sensibly and generally not as a slow substitute for mental arithmetic. The curriculum allows pupils of all ages to use and develop their numeracy skills in a wide range of contexts. Pupils are generally confident in this work and their skills allow them to make good progress. Confidence in the use of calculation, formulae, graphs and data handling in a variety of contexts is above average and observed in design and technology, geography, history and physical education.

40. Science

117. Rates of progress in science are good throughout the school. This is due to the positive attitudes of pupils and students coupled with good teaching across all key stages. Levels of attainment are therefore well above average at the end of Key Stage 3 and 4 and above average at the end of the sixth form. End of Key Stage 3 test scores and GCSE results were well above average in 1999. A-Level results were above average overall in the same year.

118. Attainment overall is well above average. In 1998, the pupils' results in national tests for 14 year olds were well above the national average compared with all other schools. Results in 1999 were similar indicating that the faculty is maintaining standards in this key stage. Compared to schools of a similar nature attainment was well above average both in 1998 and 1999. Over the last three years test results have improved. Girls' attainment is above that of boys but the gap has narrowed. This reflects the standards seen in pupils' work. Pupils' performance in the science tests in 1999 was better than those in mathematics but similar to English results. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is also well above average. In 1999 the proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-C in the various science examinations was well above average compared with all schools. Results in 1999 were better than those in 1998. Results in 1999 were better than those in mathematics and English. Attainment in the sixth form is above average. Results in 1999 in chemistry and biology were above the national average in terms of higher grades and the

overall pass rate. Results in physics were below the national average but were better in 1999 compared with 1998. Attainment on a day-to-day basis reflects the results achieved in examinations.

119. Knowledge and understanding of scientific concepts are very good. Investigative and experimental skills are well developed. Pupils and students use scientific terminology well. For example, a Year 7 pupil defined a hypothesis as a statement that could be tested. They can apply their scientific knowledge in unfamiliar situations. They have a good grasp of important issues such as ecology and the impact of man on the environment.

120. Pupils enter the school with attainment that is well above average for their age. The science curriculum is well planned and matched to the needs of the pupils. It offers good continuity and progression. The faculty has established very good links with its partner primary schools by means of its 'Bubbles' science project. Good teaching in this key stage leads to good progress being made by pupils. The pupils make good progress in all aspects of the subject. For example, higher-attaining pupils make good progress in the study of life processes and living things. They have a good knowledge of the process of photosynthesis and test plant leaves for the presence of starch. Average-attaining pupils make good progress in their understanding of physical processes. For example, they have a good knowledge of energy types and explain clearly the energy transformations present in every day processes. Lower-attaining pupils make good progress in their knowledge and understanding of materials and their properties. They deduce the reactivity series of metals by observing and performing reactions of the metals with water and acid. All pupils in this key stage make good progress in experimental and investigative science that has been helped by the introduction of a pilot scheme. The procedures for assessing pupils' progress are very good and accurately measure the capability of the pupils at the end of the key stage. The scheme of work in this key stage is effective in delivering the science curriculum.

121. Good progress is made in Key Stage 4. This is due to the good standards of teaching in the faculty, positive attitudes and good motivation of the pupils. The science curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant in this key stage. Pupils can freely choose either three separate sciences or double-award science; pupils are also advised whether single-award science is a suitable option for them. These courses are carefully planned using the schemes of work and take account of pupils' differing abilities. Higher-attaining pupils have a good understanding of physical processes. They explain, for example, how an electromagnet works and plot the lines of magnetic force around it. Average-attaining pupils have a good understanding of humans as organisms. For example, they understand the process of respiration and explain the mechanisms of breathing. Lower-attaining pupils are competent in their use of materials and their properties. A Year 11 group, for example, predicted from their chemical knowledge how concentration would effect the rate of reaction of sodium thiosulphate with dilute acid and were able to test this prediction experimentally. Again, pupils make good progress overall in experimental and investigative science. This is due to careful planning for the teaching of this attainment target in the schemes of work so that pupils are very aware of the criteria required for the awarding of marks.

122. In both Key Stages 3 and 4 pupils with special educational needs make good progress in their science education. They achieve the targets set for them as a result of effective support from teachers in their lessons.

123. The good progress seen in Key Stages 3 and 4 is maintained in the sixth form. Good specialist teaching and positive attitudes ensure that these students develop the problem-solving and critical analysis skills necessary for success at this level. In chemistry students identify an organic solid by measuring its melting point. In biology they had a good knowledge of the function of the heart whilst in physics they calculate the momentum of two moving bodies and hence determine whether collisions between them were elastic or inelastic. Progress in all key stages is aided by the good relationships established between students, pupils and teachers.

124. Teaching is good overall across all the key stages. In about one fifth of the lessons it is very good and good in over three-quarters. All lessons observed were at least satisfactory. Teachers have a good command and knowledge of their subject specialisms and focus clearly on objectives and learning outcomes. Lessons, including practicals, are well planned. There are high expectations of pupils' abilities being realised and their behaviour appropriate. In Key Stage 3 there is an effective focus on literacy skills which helps pupils progress well in their science studies. There is a good variety of activities with which pupils engage. Assessment of pupils' and students' work is very good and informs teaching. For example, a Year 11 group were able to re-focus on areas of biology that they under-performed on by analysing their module test results. Day-to-day assessment of pupils' work by the marking of their books is consistent with comments often highlighting their strengths and weaknesses. Time and resources are well used.

There was a very good mix of discussion, practical work and theory that resulted in the pupils in that class making very good progress. However in some lessons teaching is too prescriptive, lessons are too teacher-directed and not all pupils are engaged in discussions. The monitoring of teaching and learning in the department needs further development so as to share the good practice present. However overall teaching is a strength of the department.

125. Throughout the school pupils and students are interested in their work and this aids their progress. They have positive attitudes towards their science lessons. They sustain concentration well. Good relationships have been built up between pupils and teachers, which is constructive to the learning process. The quality of pupils' work displayed in the department is excellent and is a very good indicator of their enthusiasm for the subject. Behaviour is invariably good despite some classes being relatively large. The departments extend interest in science through many extra-curricular activities including field trips and outside visits. The department has built an effective learning environment that enables the teachers to do their job well.

126. Pupils speak fluently in science lessons. They are good listeners and can write in depth on scientific topics particularly in investigative and experimental science. Numeracy is well developed and is an essential part of the good progress pupils make in science. Pupils' experience and use of information and communication technology are satisfactory but this is an area of the curriculum that needs further development.

127. The standard of accommodation is good. However a small proportion of science lessons take place in ordinary classrooms. In laboratories and around the department the learning environment is enhanced both by displays of pupils' work and scientific artifacts. The organisation of the subject is very good both strategically and on a day-to-day basis. Teachers work very well together as a team. The technical staff work hard and efficiently to ensure that the department runs smoothly. They play an important part in the delivery of the departments' Health and Safety policy.

128. Since the previous inspection the teaching in the department has improved. Assessment of pupils' capabilities is more thorough. The department has introduced policies and curriculum developments that have improved the delivery of the science curriculum.

40.

OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

40. Art

129. Rates of progress are very good, due to the combined factors of pupils' very good attitudes to art and very good teaching. Excellent accommodation, very good resources and a rich programme of extra-curricular activities also contribute significantly to pupils' rapid development. In National Curriculum assessment at the end of Key Stage 3, in GCSE results at the end of Key Stage 4 and in A-Level results at the end of the sixth form, the quality and standard of art-work is well above national averages.

130. Overall attainment is well above average. Levels of attainment at Key Stage 3 are well above average. The proportion of pupils reaching at least the expected standard at the end of Key Stage 3 is well above the national average; that reaching at least the higher standards is well above the national average. Teacher assessment at the end of Key Stage 3 is slightly too generous but correctly assesses pupils' abilities to be better than the national average abilities. At present, the department does not use example portfolios of pupils' work as a benchmark against which to assess levels. Levels of attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 are well above average. A*- C grade GCSE passes for the past three years have been well above the average for similar schools and there is a rising trend. Examination results at A-Level are above average and in some years have been well above average. In 1999 fourteen candidates entered the examination and eight gained A-B grades and all gained A-E grades. Work seen during the inspection confirms that standards in all three key stages are well above average.

131. Overall rates of progress are very good. At Key Stage 3 pupils have an excellent understanding of what they are doing and why. They make the very good mental progression of using their observational drawings as a basis and starting point for expressive and abstract work. Rates of progress at Key Stage 4 and at A-Level are also very good. Throughout the three key stages pupils build on their prior learning, to increasingly apply theory to practice and develop their individual creative and expressive style. Progress of pupils with special educational needs at both

Key Stages 3 and 4 is satisfactory. Pupils quickly learn that art studies have an academic rigour. From Year 7 onwards pupils are required to do visual research as homework and keep a sketchbook as a visual resource and ideas book. By the end of Key Stage 3, the sketchbooks produced throughout the key stage show a good record of progression. The development of skills, awareness of established artists' work and of the reasons for art in society, are easily identified as assimilated elements in pupils' knowledge and understanding of art. By Key Stage 4, when the sketchbook habit is more developed and a more mature approach is adopted, considerable academic rigour, interest and the skilful use of media become evident. Pupils at this stage benefit greatly from visits to galleries where they are able to sketch and record the work of other artists. This way of working continues in the sixth form when students show that they are capable of complex studies using a wide range of media. They show an aptitude and ability to experiment with media and are prepared to use media in unconventional ways to obtain a desired effect or to convey a concept or feeling. A-Level work is very expressive and imaginative. Students show a very mature perception and develop their work from observational drawings into art forms that seek to express abstract feelings and concepts in new ways.

132. Overall, the quality of teaching is very good with no marked differences between the different key stages. The quality of teaching is the most significant factor in the very good standards obtained by the pupils. The teachers are all specialists with an enthusiasm for their subject. They set high standards and have high expectations of pupils. They plan and resource their lessons well to secure maximum interest. The teachers, to give the pupils the best possible starting points, provide good initial stimulus displays and make prime source material available. They introduce their lessons well and convey to pupils exactly what is required and what learning experiences are intended in a lesson. They stress the process of developing artwork, relating it to how the eye perceives and how the mind works. The process is rigorous and the work produced by the pupils has integrity. Teachers use praise well. They give good opportunities for pupils to write at length in historical studies and to speak about their own art in class. They give continuous feedback to pupils both verbally and in writing. Pupils understand how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. Teachers require homework to be done to enrich pupils' art experience. They open the art rooms each lunchtime to allow pupils to work and frequently arrange visits to local art galleries. The work of artists is included by the teachers at a very good level. Teachers' high expectations are matched by very good teaching. The only observed weakness in the teaching was a lack of timing, pace and variety of activity in a very few lessons at Key Stage 3. This causes some pupils, for example those with special educational needs, to make slower progress than the majority. The concentration span of some young pupils was seen to wane after long periods of activity, needing a further motivational input by the teacher.

133. Overall, pupils' response to art is very good. At all key stages a good interest and enthusiasm is shown for art. Pupils obviously like the subject. They are allowed several freedoms in the art studios, which encourages their sense of responsibility and independence. They are diligent and sensible, show a respect for others in the class and for the work of others. They show pride in their work. They have an excellent recall of work done previously and can speak knowledgeably about art, using specialist words and language well. Their independent study skills become well developed by the end of Key Stage 3 and are used to very good effect throughout Key Stage 4 and A-Level.

134. The department is managed excellently. The minor weaknesses identified in the last report have been successfully addressed. The issue of insufficient IT opportunities in art, identified in the last report, still remains an issue. The department has insufficient access to computers. The head of department has a good vision for the future development and direction of the department. His leadership indicates a potential for an even stronger department capable of excellence. Evidence indicates that standards and the quality of education provided in the visual arts are significantly better than at the time of the previous inspection when, nonetheless, art was deemed to be an effective experience for pupils.

Design and Technology

135. Pupils' overall rates of progress are good. This is due to the positive attitudes of pupils to thoroughly planned teaching. However, progress could be better during Key Stage 3 with more co-ordination between different aspects of the subject and by teaching pupils to make decisions and work more independently. Standards of attainment are therefore average at the end of Key Stage 3, above average at the end of Key Stage 4 and average in the sixth form. GCSE results were just above average in 1998 but have improved substantially in 1999. A-Level results have been below average with small numbers of students in 1998 and 1999 but GNVQ results have been above average in both years.

136. Overall attainment is above average. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is average. Teacher assessments show an above average proportion of pupils achieving level 5 but only an average proportion achieving higher than this. The procedure for arriving at teacher assessments is broadly satisfactory, however because this is carried out in relation to minimum expected grades and then converted to National Curriculum levels there is some likelihood of marginal inaccuracies. At the end of Key Stage 4 attainment is above average. GCSE results in 1998 were only just above average but in 1999 there has been substantial improvement and 68 per cent of pupils were awarded grades A* to C compared with the national average of 50 per cent; however, the number of pupils gaining grades A* and A are not proportionately as good. Girls achieve better results than boys in a similar ratio to the national pattern. The different areas of the subject mostly achieve similar results, with systems and control achieving a higher, and textiles a lower, proportion of grades A* to C. There were seven A-Level candidates in 1998 and five in 1999, these achieved below average results in 1998 and just below average results in 1999. Of the seven students taking GNVQ in 1998 and five in 1999, seven were awarded distinctions which is above average. However, the numbers of students taking these courses in these two years is too small for their results to be significant.

137. During Key Stage 3 pupils make satisfactory progress. The scheme of work is planned separately for food, textiles, resistant materials, systems and control, and graphics. Whilst there is progression in each of these areas and the requirements of the National Curriculum programme of study are covered, this leads to some unnecessary repetition and pupils do not build up a coherent understanding of the common processes of designing and making.

138. Excessive use of worksheets in most areas, whilst supporting the pupils with special educational needs and pupils of low prior attainment, limits the progress of those pupils capable of higher attainment. Brighter pupils are not required to extend research and the development of ideas beyond the structure provided in common worksheets, although some do chose to extend their projects independently. Two design and make projects in Year 9 and some textiles projects are an exception. Most pupils mostly make good progress in acquiring knowledge and skills in each of the areas but make more limited progress in learning to make informed decisions in relation to both designing and making. For instance pupils will be shown how to carry out a making task without this being used to teach them how to select appropriate processes in related situations. Standards of making and the quality of finishing are mostly good. Pupils develop sufficient drawing skills to use drawing effectively as a design tool. Therefore, whilst the good progress made in acquiring knowledge during the key stage provides a foundation for their future work, their lack of experience of decision making tends to limit their progress in developing designs independently in Key Stage 4.

139. Pupils make good progress during Key Stage 4 because there is better continuity and development and their progress is systematically checked. Deadlines for parts of their design folders ensure that individual pupils do not get behind, hence all produce work which is relevant to all areas of the GCSE mark scheme. This does, however, tend to focus pupils' attention on a set process rather more than on selecting ways to create better products. Whilst this ensures that some pupils of lower prior attainment make very good progress, higher-attaining pupils tend not to show the personal involvement in designing that leads to the highest quality work. All pupils show good drawing skills and present their work to very high standards, often making very good use of computers. Pupils studying the systems and control option have very good knowledge, achieve standards of design in electronics which are well above average and make very good use of computers for designing circuits.

140. Students make good progress in the sixth form. Most are beginning to become more involved in the independent development of their projects although in Year 12 particularly, some students are reluctant to carry out independent research. The availability of a wider range of resource books, as opposed to textbooks, in the department and in the library would help to encourage more independent approaches. Nearly all project folders are well presented, usually using computers; indeed students have not learned to value experimental work which is not in pristine condition. Such work is absent from most folders. Standards of drawing and its use for designing are very good. The larger groups currently taking the A-Level course are creating a more committed ethos with the result that progress has improved and standards of attainment are likely to be higher than in previous years. Advanced-level GNVQ Manufacturing students make good progress and respond well to the structure of the course. They make particularly good progress through the very good industrial links which are a feature of this course both in acquiring knowledge and in learning to work effectively with other people. There is a lack of facilities for computer-aided manufacture which means that the two-day session at a local university cannot be followed up within the school, thus limiting progress in this area of manufacture.

141. The overall standard of teaching is good. There was no unsatisfactory teaching observed, which is an improvement on the previous inspection. Teaching was judged to be satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The teachers are committed to improving standards but, with significant recent staff changes, there is a need to achieve greater consistency of approach. The need to use supply teachers in the food area because of long term absence is unfortunate at this developmental time for the subject. All teachers have a good knowledge of their specialist areas and some offer interesting alternatives such as glass-working which is used to provide a valuable additional studies course. Planning is thorough but mostly needs to encourage more independent research and designing. Extensive use of worksheets militates against the development of independent study. At Key Stage 4 careful assessment leading to appropriate target setting and modifications to the scheme of work has raised standards substantially. In the best lessons teachers convey enthusiasm to pupils. Teachers give up a substantial amount of their own time to support pupils' GCSE project work which is made necessary because the time available to the subject is less than the national average and less than other GCSE subjects in the school. Teachers make very good use of external resources to support sections of the A-Level syllabus and the industrial contacts that are so well used in teaching the GNVQ course.

142. Pupils mostly have positive attitudes to their work but the level of personal involvement with designing products is not as high as it could be. However their commitment to the quality of presentation is high. Pupils in Year 7 are very enthusiastic but this enthusiasm is not wholly sustained throughout the key stage. Pupils concentrate well, respond well to questions, and many have an inquiring approach to the subject which is not at the moment fully exploited during Key Stage 3. There is a limited amount of group work but pupils co-operate well when this is required. Students develop a mature approach in the sixth form, making presentations and carrying out some of their work through industrial links. The numbers of students choosing to study design and technology in the sixth form has increased substantially since 1998.

143. There have been significant improvements in the standards achieved since the previous inspection and particularly in the past year. There is an appropriate vision for the long term development of the department and several measures have been successfully put in place to raise attainment, particularly at Key Stage 4. The faculty has not yet developed a coherent curriculum at Key Stage 3 which lays a foundation for pupils' interest in designing and making and for their decision making throughout Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.

Geography

144. Standards have improved since the previous inspection. Attainment in 1994 was average at the end of Key Stage 3 and both GCSE and A-Level results were above the national averages. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 and the results in the GCSE are now well above the national averages. In terms of the proportion of A to C grades the A-Level results are still above the national average. This improvement is due to consistently good and often very good teaching.

145. Overall attainment in geography is well above average. By the end of Key Stage 3 assessments by teachers indicate that attainment is well above the national average with little difference between that of boys and girls. In the 1999 GCSE examination the proportion of pupils achieving A* to C grades shows a big improvement on 1998 and is well above the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining A* grades is very high. The attainment of girls is slightly above that of boys in line with the national trend. At A-Level the proportion of students who attain the higher grades A and B is close to the national average.

146. Progress is good overall. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 is well above average. This represents very good progress made by pupils of all abilities in this key stage. This is ensured by very good teaching which is effectively planned, carefully matches resources to pupils' abilities and involves them in a variety of learning activities. It provides opportunities for pupils to be responsible for their own learning through projects and to use extended writing in conclusions. In each topic key words are identified to improve literacy and pupils gradually develop their geographical vocabulary. In Year 7 pupils draw land-use maps of Lymm. With help they analyse these using systematic sampling and produce bar graphs and pie-charts of their results. They progress to identifying land-use changes over time using aerial photographs. In Year 8 pupils describe the different features of rivers and begin to understand how these were formed by the processes of erosion. In Year 9 pupils read and analyse a variety of texts, worksheets, photographs, maps and graphs to research how Japan has developed its economy. This very good progress would be extended further with the provision of opportunities for fieldwork in Year 9.

147. All pupils in Key Stage 4 make good progress. This is achieved by good teaching although it does not consistently use the range of learning activities employed in Key Stage 3 and pupils have less responsibility for their own learning. In Year 10 pupils develop their knowledge and understanding of the delicate balance of the tropical forest ecosystem in relation to the impact of economic development. In Year 11 they extend their knowledge of the structure of population by applying this to the model of demographic transition and then relating these to the stages of economic development. For coursework pupils collect and collate data on traffic problems in Ambleside. They present their findings using a variety of techniques and analyse these before considering the relative advantages and disadvantages of different routes for a by-pass. Overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is above average.

148. All students in the sixth form make good progress. Fieldwork techniques are developed and extended in the sixth form to measuring physical processes in river channels, investigating the effects of glaciation and comparing different coastal environments. Students complete coursework on a variety of problems related to land use and developments to establish their impact on both physical and human geography. In writing of considerable quality students describe in detail and explain the cycle of industrial growth and decline in relation to the coal-mining industry in South Wales with a focus on its impact on the whole environment. Formal assessment is having a positive impact on progress. It enables the progress of pupils and students to be closely monitored and assists teachers in identifying common weaknesses which can be improved in future teaching. Overall attainment at the end of the sixth form is above average.

149. Teaching is good overall. It is very good in Key Stage 3. This is a big improvement since the previous inspection when it was generally sound in this key stage. In Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form it is consistently good and occasionally very good. Teachers have a very good knowledge of geography. This is clear in their explanations and detailed lesson plans. They skilfully match resources to different abilities enabling all pupils and students to make good progress. There is a good balance between teacher input and pupils working. Good use is made of time and pupils and students are challenged. The very good teaching moved lessons along at a brisk pace, used a variety of techniques including fieldwork, projects and role play. In a lesson on redevelopment in the inner city areas of Manchester pupils worked in pairs and then shared their ideas on the social and environmental problems which arose. They made their own notes and were challenged to produce a reasoned argument on whom was to blame for the failure of these schemes. When learning about tourism in Kenya pupils were involved in a role-play exercise. Representatives with different interests presented their views on the expansion of tourism to a "television" audience. Through asking questions the class - or audience - then became involved in a lively debate on the issues. Pupils were enthusiastic and made very good progress. The use of information technology in the teaching of geography has developed since the previous inspection. Pupils access data on rainfall and temperature to produce graphs and compare Lymm with Langley. In another exercise they produce world maps with located pie-charts on six countries to illustrate their employment structure and relate these to economic development. Many pupils and students use this technology to present their projects and coursework and one desk-top published leaflet on tourism in Kenya was produced to commercial standards. All work, including appropriately enriching homework, is marked regularly and constructively so that pupils and students have guidelines for improvement. This good teaching has a considerable impact on progress.

150. Attitudes to learning and behaviour are consistently very good. These were clearly exemplified in an introductory lesson when pupils worked in pairs on their perception of Japan. They shared their ideas and then listened with respect and interest to a Japanese visitor with whom they discussed their images. In each year there is a growing focus on economic development and technological change and the impact these have on the environment. Social, moral and cultural issues are considered. In Year 9 pupils produce an extended piece of writing showing pupils' empathy with the influence of tourism on the traditional semi-nomadic lifestyle of the Masai people in Kenya. Their very good attitudes have a beneficial effect on their progress and attainment.

151. The management of the department is very good and the accommodation is excellent. The provision of geography books in the library is much improved and the stock reflects the topics which are taught. Consequently the library is used for teaching. Procedures are in place for monitoring both the curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning. The staff have very good professional relationships and work well as a team. They use assessment data to identify weaknesses in curriculum planning and teaching which they rectify. They are committed to sustaining and improving on the success of recent years. Detailed plans on how to achieve this by extending the very good teaching in Key Stage 3 to Key Stage 4 and the sixth form have not yet been produced. Some, yet

insufficient, opportunities are taken to share the good practice to be found in the department.

History

40.

40. 152. Overall, pupils and students make good progress. Attainment, therefore, is generally well above average. Pupils' level of attainment is above average in history on entry to the school and progress is good throughout each key stage and in the sixth form. This is due to very good teaching, very good attitudes to learning by pupils, matched by very good accommodation and resources.

153. Inspection evidence shows that pupils' attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 is well above average. This is also reflected in the teachers' assessment of National Curriculum levels achieved by pupils. At the end of Key Stage 4, pupils are attaining at well above average overall, with a large number achieving the highest grades in the GCSE examination than in similar schools nationally. These results show a year-on-year improvement from 1998 to the present, and are also higher than at the time of the previous inspection. Lower-attaining pupils achieve higher grades than the school's predictions indicated. In the sixth form, A-Level results are well above average, the majority of students achieving the highest grades, which is well above the average. Attainment in the current year is also well above average in the grades already awarded.

154. Pupils make good progress during Key Stage 3, developing good basic skills and understanding. They write at length in reconstructing the past. One Year 7 group revealed great imagination in recreating in extended writing the events of the Battle of Hastings. Progress is enhanced by well-organised out-of-class activities, such as the re-enactment of the Battle of Hastings in the school grounds. Pupils develop considerable interest during Key Stage 3 which is sustained and reinforced as they move through the school. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and write very well, being effectively helped in class by teachers. In some cases, materials designed for their needs are under-developed. Standards of writing, reading and speaking are very high and the use of IT by pupils is very good even though this is mostly through using their own computers at home. There is good use of skills of numeracy. One Year 7 group spent some time in working out the numbers of barons, knights and peasants as part of work on the feudal system. Progress is good in Key Stage 3 because pupils are interested and actively involved and carefully assessed and guided. A foundation is laid for respect for accuracy in interpreting the past and in working hard at the tasks set.

155. Progress is good throughout Key Stage 4, giving results in the GCSE which are well above average. Progress is good because pupils are engaged by the use of innovative methods such as role-play and simulation. They are motivated also by participating in extra-curricular activities, including visits to the residential centre and events such as the annual educational visit to the battle-field sites. Lower-attaining pupils make good progress where a thematic approach is adopted in coursework, for example in the history of medicine. Assessment and targeting are important in ensuring good progress because individuals are carefully guided to self-knowledge about what they can achieve.

156. Progress is very good in the sixth form, where students are stretched by challenging teaching and the use of up-to-date resources. They work independently and develop very good research skills which lead to some very mature writing. Oral discussion of documents shows very good speaking and listening skills. One-sixth form group show very good analytical skills and mature judgement in discussion of sources about the Russian Revolution. Progress is good in developing IT in coursework, but more could be made of the school's resources if there was a link from the classroom to the internet. Progress is good in preparing students very well for examinations by clear targeting of the grades they should aim to achieve.

157. The overall quality of teaching is very good. Teachers use their up-to-date knowledge coupled with innovative methods designed to involve pupils. They apply interactive approaches which help pupils to enter into the spirit of the past. One Year 9 class experienced an intense emotional involvement, by being stimulated by letters and poetry, to write their own letter from the trenches in 1914. Teaching often has a more powerful impact where lessons on topics such as the Holocaust involve meeting Holocaust survivors, invited into school, and visiting Auschwitz. Teachers frequently adopt a challenging style, setting high standards and a brisk pace, which is particularly effective with higher-attaining pupils. Time and resources are used very well, employing the teaching period for the full hour. Classes are well organised and resources are very well used so that classes are closely managed. In a few lessons, however, there is a need for methods and materials to be used which are more suited to the needs of lower-attaining pupils. Teachers set tasks in class and for homework which are scrupulously marked, as noted in the previous

inspection, so that pupils are very clear about their targets.

158. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good and a major contributory factor to pupils' progress and attainment. They are punctual and ready to learn, settle down quickly and show great interest in history. There is an ethos for learning that characterises their approach in and out of the classroom. Year 9 took part with enthusiasm in 'A 1914 Recruitment Day' with whole school participation, simulations, costuming, drama and drill exercises in the school grounds. Pupils talked about this some time afterwards; its effect was reflected in their fuller understanding in lessons and in their extended written work. Pupils are frequently given opportunities to reflect on spiritual, moral and ethical issues through a direct historical experience such as the annual visit to the Battlefields Sites, which results in a well written and moving booklet.

159. The leadership and organisation of the department contribute substantially to the quality of teaching and learning. There is an effective team of specialists who manage the curriculum and resources very well. There is effective staff appraisal, staff development and curriculum monitoring, but more support is still needed for non-specialist teachers. Standards at the time of the previous inspection were described as 'generally good'; standards now are well above average and the quality of learning in history is exceptionally good. Since the previous inspection, accommodation has been improved and the suite of rooms offers very high standards, permitting excellent displays of pupils' work, including charts, pictures and models. Resources are excellent and very well organised. Since 1994, the system for recording and monitoring pupils' progress has been improved, but still not enough analysis of progress occurs in assessing achievement of National Curriculum targets in Key Stage 3 and providing more detailed annual information to parents.

40.

Sociology, government and politics

160. The sixth form attracts an increasing number of students taking sociology, and government and politics. Most students say they are taking them because of their intrinsic interest, but a small number are planning career paths in the social sciences. Students make good progress in these subjects and attainment is generally above average, although results at A-Level have been average in 1998 and 1999 in the proportion of students achieving passes at grades A and B. Current students are achieving mostly at the higher grades. Teaching in the sixth form is very good, challenging the students to think and argue their case. Methods used show imagination and students are fully involved. Lessons are very active, supplemented by visits, for example to parliament. Students are led to consider the broader moral issues raised in many areas of their study. Coursework shows very good writing and a good, well integrated use of IT.

Information technology

161. In Information Technology (IT) lessons in Key Stages 3, 4 and the sixth form the overall progress is good. Overall levels of attainment are well above the national average in assessments at the end of Key Stage 3, GCSE and A-Level examinations. Pupils show interest, listen carefully to their teachers and work steadily most of the time. More boys than girls choose to study IT at GCSE and A-Level. Pupils who do not choose to study IT in Key Stage 4 do not follow a well organised programme of studies and their progress is limited. The school does not report to parents progress made by pupils in using IT to support learning.

162. The overwhelming majority of pupils in Key Stage 3 are working at or above the expected level, and pupils achieve grades at GCSE and A-Level that are well above the national average. GCSE results in 1999 were significantly improved on 1998. Perhaps as a result, the number of pupils choosing to study A-Level computing increased significantly from 1998 to 1999.

163. In IT lessons in Key Stage 3, all pupils, including those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress as they work through well structured work sheets that ensure they keep records of their work; they know what is expected of them and make satisfactory progress. For example, in Year 9, pupils enter text, numerical values and formulae into a spreadsheet. They listen carefully as the teacher explains how to enter formulae and when to use them. Even so, some pupils enter values where formulae should be used but realise their mistake and correct it. Pupils print their spreadsheets showing both values and formulae, and attach these to their work sheets to keep a record of what they have done. Pupils make good progress in IT lessons in Key Stage 4. They listen carefully, work independently, and show interest and sustained concentration. At this key stage pupils do well at their GCSE coursework tasks; these are demanding and pupils produce substantial and detailed work. Sixth form students make satisfactory progress: for example, their understanding of multi-programming is extended by well structured, interactive questioning by their teacher.

164. In lessons in Key Stage 3, most pupils cooperate effectively most of the time when working in pairs and sharing a computer. GCSE and sixth form students almost always have sole use of a computer in lessons. Pupils interest in IT often continues beyond timetabled lessons; there is a popular IT club at lunch-time, and the majority of pupils have access to IT resources at home. A small group of eight sixth form students study keyboard and computing skills and take an examination validated by the Royal Society of Arts.

165. Teaching of discrete IT is good at each key stage. It is consistently good during whole class, interactive teaching where teachers carefully develop pupils' understanding through well structured questioning which challenges them. For example, in Key Stage 3, pupils understanding of the logic of a flowchart to control the temperature in a greenhouse is developed through challenging, step-by-step questioning by the teacher. Similarly, in the sixth form, students are closely questioned to ensure they understand some of the complexities of the subject. The atmosphere in the classroom is relaxed and teachers support and encourage their pupils, intervening accurately and effectively to maintain a focus on work when this is necessary. Many teachers have good knowledge of the strands of information technology. Amongst these teachers their skills and understanding are evident in the planning of units of study; there is a good balance in the curriculum between communicating and handling information, and controlling measuring and modelling. However, when teachers assess pupils' work, there is very little diagnostic marking and as a result pupils do not always know what they must do to make progress. For example, in Key Stage 3, pupils' work is usually marked but this does not always indicate what pupils must do to improve their work and a

grade or mark is not always given or recorded using the portfolio monitoring sheets in use in the department. There are tasks available for lower-attaining pupils in Key Stage 3 designed to meet their particular learning needs. Some satisfactory use is made of these but, overall, support for pupils with special educational needs is not a strong feature even though this has improved since the previous inspection. Those pupils who do not choose to study information technology for the GCSE examination receive patchy experience of computer-assisted learning. In consequence, their experiences of IT as a whole do not meet the requirements of the National Curriculum programmes of study. The departmental system for assessing and recording pupils' work is potentially effective but it is not used thoroughly and consistently. Support assistants and sixth form students are present in some lessons in Key Stages 3 and 4, where they support particular pupils and also assist other pupils who are working independently at tasks set by the teacher. The work of support assistants and teachers is very effective. All the IT rooms have attractive displays that include pupils' work. Insufficient improvement has been made in the use of information technology since the previous inspection. Although provision for pupils with special educational needs is now satisfactory, the organisation of cross-curricular information technology, described in 1994 as being 'at an early stage of development' remains currently under-developed in several subjects and in the sixth form.

Key Skills: the use of information technology to enhance learning across the curriculum:

166. Pupils' use of IT in other subjects is more extensive than it was at the time of the previous inspection but this is not well coordinated or integrated with the work they do in IT lessons. Pupils make good use of IT across the curriculum in mathematics, geography, design technology and modern foreign languages but many pupils do not have access to those opportunities that are available, and in some subjects the use of IT to support teaching and learning is very limited. For example, those pupils who do the systems and control option in GCSE design technology make good use of software that helps them design electronic circuits, however, this opportunity is not available to all pupils in Key Stage 4. In geography pupils use word-processing and desk top publishing software to produce high quality booklets. In religious education and music, opportunities to use IT are very limited; sixth form students have very limited access to IT resources to support independent study. Even so, displays on notice boards in the corridors and in many classrooms show that pupils and teachers use IT to improve the effectiveness of their communication and display work.

Modern foreign languages

167. Overall, pupils make good progress in modern foreign languages throughout the school. This is due to good teaching, which succeeds in involving pupils actively in their learning, pupils' positive attitudes to languages and good rates of attendance. Levels of attainment are well above average at the end of Key Stage 3, and above average at the end of Key Stage 4 and when pupils complete their Sixth Form studies.

168. Teacher assessments for 1999 at the end of Key Stage 3 reflect the continuing improvement in standards, due to consistently good teaching. Most pupils reach level 5 and many higher-attaining pupils progress to Level 6. Attainment in their second language, which they begin in Year 8, is above average and well above the average for second language learners nationally.

169. Since the previous inspection the proportions of pupils achieving GCSE grades A*-C have been consistently well above the national average in German and above average in French. In 1999 results improved further in both languages and most significantly in French as a direct result of more focused teaching and the close monitoring and mentoring of borderline candidates. Proportions achieving A*-C grades in French rose to well above national average, bringing it in line with German, though the proportions achieving A*/A was lower than in 1998. In German, as well as increasing the proportions gaining A*-C, more than a quarter of pupils entered achieved A*/A grades. GCSE Spanish had its first entry in 1999 for pupils who began Spanish in Key Stage 4. Proportions achieving grades A*-C were below average, reflecting both the wide ability in the class and the limited time the subject was studied.

170. Attainment at A-Level is above average in German and is broadly average in French and Spanish. In 1998 proportions achieving pass grades in German were below average. In 1999 results improved significantly to just above average with half the pupils entered achieving A/B grades. Results in French were lower in 1999 than in 1998 and were below average in both years.

171. Overall progress through Key Stage 3 is good. Strong emphasis is placed on listening and speaking and pupils

of all abilities develop these skills well. As pupils are accustomed to hearing the foreign language spoken consistently in lessons most learn to understand classroom instructions readily and to speak with good pronunciation. Writing, too, is strong. Pupils learn basic grammar structures and are introduced early to the past tense, which helps them to build sentences of increasing length and to progress more quickly towards the expected standard for their age. Pupils acquire a large quantity of vocabulary and generally show good understanding of worksheets and texts they read in their course books. However, there is scope for them to develop their reading skills further by having the opportunity to handle longer printed texts and to read short stories on a regular basis. Higher-attaining pupils progress rapidly in their sets, speaking and writing more confidently, especially in German, as they learn to apply their knowledge. However, they do not have sufficient opportunities to write freely at any length in either language. Average and lower-attaining pupils make particularly good progress in listening and speaking and they learn to adapt models to write short paragraphs. In Key Stage 4 progress is consistently good in Spanish, which is introduced as a second language in Key Stage 4, and in German, due to the good quality of teaching. Higher-attaining pupils in German and in the dual linguist French set develop their spoken and written style well by learning to use more complex structures and they develop the higher level skills to extract abstract information from tapes and printed material. In the higher French sets there is sometimes insufficient opportunity to practise and develop these higher level skills. While pupils learn to speak and write at greater length, in French there is sometimes too much emphasis on transactional role-play and they are less secure in their ability to apply grammar rules correctly. Some average attaining boys speak and write at less length than girls, they pay less attention to detail and apply rules less consistently, which leads to some underachievement. Lower-attaining pupils rework some material from the previous key stage though also build upon it. Their limited capacity to memorize and recall vocabulary slows progress. Pupils with special educational needs benefit from being taught in small sets and they make good progress in both key stages, leaving school with a GCSE certificate in the language studied. At A-Level, good progress is made in Spanish and in German where good teaching and effective teamwork for shared classes ensures pupils make the gains in language acquisition to enable them to discuss and debate issues with confidence and maturity. In French progress is closer to satisfactory because teaching is not always sufficiently stimulating or well planned to push pupils forward fast enough.

172. Teaching in modern languages throughout the school is good. It is consistently good in German with some very good teaching in Key Stage 3. Teaching in French is good in Key Stage 3. It is never less than satisfactory in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form and is sometimes good. Action has already been taken to improve the quality of teaching in French in the sixth form with the introduction of a more rigorous scheme of work and closer monitoring, but the full effects of this action have yet to be felt. Teaching in Spanish is very good in Key Stage 4. Japanese, Russian and Italian which have been introduced into the sixth form since the school acquired language college status, are well taught to the small number of motivated students involved. Teachers have a good command of the languages they teach and their use of the foreign language in the classroom is consistent across the department. Where teaching is good, lessons have clear objectives, are challenging and move at a brisk pace. Resources are well chosen to stimulate interest and activities are planned so as to involve pupils actively in the lesson. For example, following a lively presentation by a teacher using flashcards and overhead transparencies to introduce new vocabulary and structures, Year 7 pupils engaged in a survey around the class, confidently using the new language to seek and note information about other pupils' pets. In another lesson, after the teacher and the foreign language assistant together presented a stimulating model conversation, Year 11 pupils were set fixed time limits to prepare, practise and present their own versions with the clear understanding to include the new structures and vocabulary of the lesson. In contrast to this good practice, teaching in French is only satisfactory when lessons are dominated by the teacher and pupils have limited opportunities to practise sustained speaking, or when too much time is devoted to repetitive and unchallenging exercises which inevitably slows progression. The department needs to work together to improve the quality of teaching in French by sharing good practice in order to raise levels of attainment, most specifically of higher-attaining pupils in Key Stage 4 and at A-Level. Good assessment procedures are in place across all key stages, including internal moderation and standardisation of course work, which has been introduced at GCSE and A-Level since the previous inspection. Marking is often of high quality with well written constructive comments which tell pupils how to improve but practice across the department is inconsistent and needs closer monitoring. Good use of information technology for teaching languages is now a regular feature in lessons. High quality display work in classrooms and corridors adds to the very positive ethos for learning which exists in the languages area.

173. Pupils have positive attitudes to language learning. Behaviour in lessons is good and relationships between pupils and teachers are very positive. Pupils listen well and are keen to be actively involved in oral activities. Younger pupils clearly enjoy the language games they play and singing songs. Sixth form students are well

motivated and give of their own time to improve their language competence, for example by listening to extra tapes, reading newspapers or attending conversation classes with native speakers. Older pupils take part in exchange visits to partner schools abroad.

174. Since the previous inspection the granting of language college status has led to the provision of excellent new accommodation and resources; new initiatives have been implemented and new languages introduced into the curriculum; new links have been forged with local primary schools and with schools abroad; pupil exchanges have been set up with France and Spain; the long established link with a German school in Lauf has been strengthened with work experience placements in the town. The head of faculty, strongly supported by his team of committed teachers and administrative support staff, has successfully overseen these changes without losing sight of the department's main priority, which is to raise standards of attainment.

40.

Performing Arts

175. The performing arts of dance, drama and music are managed in one department. The head of department is new to the school, comes from a background of performing arts and contributes to teaching and learning in all three arts disciplines effectively. Her leading specialism, however, is drama. The connection between the arts in performance is an approach the school has adopted successfully. In a short time productions have been presented of 'Oh! What a Lovely War!' and 'Bugsey Malone', both of which have been received by the community of the school with acclaim. Both productions involved large numbers of pupils from across the school. However, such an approach does not imply that the intrinsic, separate disciplines of dance, drama and music are not valued; teachers of these subjects bring subject-specific expertise to them, ensuring that pupils develop knowledge, skills and understanding which are necessary for successful progress and attainment. Despite limited accommodation, for there is no equipped drama studio usually found in schools of this size or a space with a good floor for dance, progress in the subjects overall is good and in dance and drama very good. The department is well led.

40.

Dance

176. Overall progress during the dance lessons in Key Stage 4 is very good. This is due to the enthusiasm and commitment of pupils and the generally good teaching of dance that occurs consistently. Dance is part of the additional subject provision and pupils do not take a GCSE examination in the subject. However, pupils are successful in other forms of accreditation, including the Northern Partnership Record of Achievement. Dance has been introduced recently and was not a regular part of curricular provision at the time of the previous inspection. Dance is also part of a new performing arts course at A-Level. Stage dance has been introduced to the curriculum since the previous inspection.

177. Progress is effective because pupils have a desire to be successful. In preparing work for its own sake for a series of performances during the Christmas period they are keen to be successful. There is evidence in Year 11 of progress over time, with pupils having developed physical confidence and a knowledge of dance presence, energy and presentation. Those taking dance in this year group are girls, and they plan their stage dance in negotiation with the teacher, being able to use appropriate technical vocabulary as they seek to bring their ideas to some realised fruition. As a result, for example in 'Consider Yourself At Home' from Lionel Bart's 'Oliver', they achieve the spirit of interpretation of the original through the successful completion of complex and fluent sequences. As part of a sixth form performing arts programme, a mixed group of boys and girls work in a similar way to produce a sensitive interpretation of 'I Don't Know How To Love Him' from 'Jesus Christ Superstar' by Andrew Lloyd Webber. Good progress in stage presence, linking singing to dance and working together as an ensemble is seen lesson-by-lesson and over longer periods of time. Both groups show a range of individual ability but all make good progress and contribute without shortcomings to a completed stage performance. The dances are effective. There is a high level of engagement in the task and a desire for constant improvement of the final performance. Pupils with special education needs are fully integrated in dance lessons and make very good progress.

178. Pupils and sixth form students work hard during dance lessons. They respond to the high expectations of teachers. They work well together, support each other and share the space with skill and sensitivity. They are ready to appraise the success or shortcomings of their own work in order to improve its quality. They enjoy a 'buzz' when things fall into place and present effectively.

179. The quality of teaching of dance is consistently good and sometimes very good. It is based on a secure

knowledge and expertise, an ability to demonstrate when necessary and the skill to enthuse and motivate pupils. Teaching encourages pupils and students to evaluate their own work, giving them sufficient technical knowledge to be able to do this effectively. Lessons are well prepared and high expectations are maintained in an atmosphere of challenge. Teaching shows an awareness of pupils' stage of development and lessons are structured to move pupils forward to further development of skills and performance. There is good communication between teacher and class with the result that lessons are conducted in a friendly and demanding, purposeful atmosphere. Good dance is celebrated but if the work is less good than that of which pupils are capable, teaching presses for improvement.

180. Levels of attainment are above average at the end of Year 11 and the sixth form. Pupils develop good understanding of the key features of stage dance and plan, perform and evaluate their work effectively. For example, in preparing the 'Oliver' dance for a performance in the community, they show perception in adapting routines to a different performance space. In the routine from 'Superstar' sixth formers helped to choreograph complex dance sequences in order that the whole was well-shaped to allow for soloists to maintain a suitable stage presence supported by the other dancers. They know the conventions of musical theatre and apply them to the evaluation of their own work. They generate the necessary physical energy to communicate creative ideas to an audience. They use their bodies expressively to contrast the pathos and hope they are seeking to express through their dancing. They appreciate the relationship of stillness to movement and silence to sound. They use their own judgements to evaluate success and suggest improvement.

40. *Drama*

181. Rates of progress in drama overall are very good. Pupils respond with enthusiasm to very good teaching. The current approach to drama is new to most pupils and their response is thoughtful and energetic. They enjoy drama lessons. The GCSE examination in drama was taken for the first time in 1999, the two-year course being completed over a year; results were high compared to the national average. Drama did not have a discrete place in the curriculum at the time of the previous inspection.

182. Levels of attainment overall are above average. At the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is well above average and as a subject newly introduced provides a very good springboard for future work later in the school. Pupils use a range of skills with increased confidence. They apply these to work in improvisation and text or the stylised response to stimuli relating to inner and outer thoughts and feelings. At the end of Key Stage 4 attainment is above average overall but in the 1999 GCSE drama examination 90 per cent of pupils achieved A*-C grades. A fifth of pupils achieved the higher A* and A grades. Overall results in the drama examination are high compared with the national average. The difference between examination results and overall attainment is explained in part by the time of year of the inspection and also by the range of work it was possible to see during the week of inspection. This was rather narrow at Key Stage 4 but the scheme of work and requirements of the examination ensure that over the full two years of the course a wider engagement with the elements of drama will be undertaken. For similar reasons and after only a few weeks of the course, levels of attainment in the sixth form performing arts course are also above average. The overall quality of teaching observed indicates a potential for repeating the examination success of 1999 in GCSE examinations in 2000 and maintaining the standard in A-Level examinations in 2001.

183. During Key Stage 3 progress of all pupils, including those with special educational needs, is very good. Pupils are beginning to experiment with different dramatic styles, incorporating an increasing range of dramatic conventions in their work. For example, in Year 7 pupils conduct a meeting between members of the council and the townsfolk of Hamelin complaining of the health hazards caused by a plague of rats. They maintain controlled characterisation in order to bring an imagined reality to their drama. Pupils in Year 8 interpret a section of Berlie Doherty's novel 'Tough Luck', using snippets of text to explore parental relationships in the novel. Excellent teaching in this lesson ensured that pupils made very good progress in textual interpretation, using improvisation to deepen and create sub-text which added meaning to simple expression. Pupils in Year 9 worked well on the notion of 'alter ego', exploring the conflict between spoken words and innermost thoughts. They managed the convention whilst working in small groups effectively. Once again, effective teaching gave pupils the confidence to extend their performance of a difficult convention.

184. During Key Stage 4 progress overall is very good, including that of pupils with special education needs. Year 11 pupils in rehearsing pieces for their mock GCSE examination show a developing ability to interpret the play scripts of others. Some pupils show a keen sense of comedy as a variety of characters, developing a wide range of vocal and movement skills to present their interpretations. As small groups they manage and present performances of

a variety of plays, some with considerable success and all to a standard in keeping with good progress made over four terms of the course. Teaching ensures that they encourage each other to achieve the best standards of which they are capable. A Year 10 class made satisfactory progress in developing the convention of 'still image' in response to different moods evoked by pieces of music. They responded well in their first few weeks of the course, beginning to articulate ideas in dramatic form, having a clear understanding of the convention being used.

185. Drama in the sixth form is a part of A-Level performing arts for the first time this year. At the time of the inspection students in the first year sixth, therefore, were preparing a song and dance sequence around Lloyd Webber's 'I Don't Know How To Love Him' so it was not possible to see all other aspects of this course in action. Nonetheless, students showed good application to the development of character within the particular convention of musical theatre. They are making good progress.

186. Pupils' attitudes to their work in drama are very good throughout the school. They respond appropriately to the specialist teaching they receive. Pupils in Key Stage 3 listen to each other carefully as they build a structure to their dramas; they respond well to teachers' prompting. When working in groups they respect each other's point of view and cooperate in order to arrive at the best possible performance in the time available to them. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, pupils and students react well to each other's presentations and are productive in the evaluation of them as they apply known and their own criteria to judging their performances. They respond well to the teachers' encouragement and evaluation of their work. They are beginning to understand the characteristics of an increasing range of dramatic conventions and genres. Many relate their own work to that of established actors or theatrical conventions they have experienced during visits to the theatre.

187. Teaching is very good overall, especially at Key Stage 3 where occasionally it is excellent. Teachers have significant expertise in the subject, combining between them a sound appreciation of performance, dramatic convention and improvisation. They understand the elements which make drama a distinct arts process, encouraging pupils to acquire a working dramatic vocabulary. Teaching is not bound by adherence to insular approaches with the result that pupils enjoy a wide experience of drama, including key aspects of innovation, text interpretation and engagement in issues arising from a variety of sources. In maintaining this flexibility of approach teachers use a range of learning and teaching styles which sustain the interest and commitment of pupils. For example, one member of the faculty relates her work well to text and aspects of work from the English curriculum; another brings to her teaching the key elements of making, performing and responding through the use of dramatic forms mainly of a performance mode. This is expressed with an energy and flair which combines singing, dance and acting at times, but always has a focus of play-making and performance. She helps pupils and students appreciate how things look in performance. Teaching is enabling pupils to experience, understand and use successfully dramatic techniques such as thought-tracking inner thoughts and feelings in Year 9, making images which portray meaning through, for example, responses to music in Year 10, managing whole-class drama set in a council meeting in Year 7 or encountering demanding text in Year 8. In Year 11 and the sixth form, skilled teaching and a knowledge of the heightened level of engagement performance can bring ensures that pupils and students enjoy and experience theatre as an art form. This is managed with proper regard to an awareness of the needs and sensibilities of all rather than an elite few.

40. *Music*

188. Progress overall is good. This is owing to good attendance, generally positive attitudes displayed by pupils, many of whom are very keen on their education in music, and sound teaching. Levels of attainment, as a result, are above average. However, this is not reflected in examination results at GCSE in 1999, where grades achieved were below the national average. Results in music technology at A-Level were broadly in line with the national average.

189. Attainment in music on entry to the school is slightly above average but by the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is above average. Most pupils make good progress across Key Stages 3 and 4. At the end of Key Stage 3 pupils use electronic keyboards and classroom percussion instruments with some competence, for both performance and composition. Pupils build on their keyboard and instrumental skills. Singing and appraising skills are near average. Pupils are able to develop and use a musical vocabulary with which to describe and appraise the music they hear. Sound teaching, good resources and excellent planning ensure that progress is maintained. Progress in the sixth form is satisfactory overall and good in relation to performance skills. Progress of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. Lack of curricular time in Year 8 creates some problems in continuity which effect rates of progress for pupils. Music teachers support special needs pupils with work to consolidate or extend classroom tasks, and this has

a positive effect on their progress. At all stages pupils have opportunities to develop most necessary musical skills.

190. At the end of Key Stage 4 standards of accomplishment are above average in performing, and slightly above average in composing and appraising. Pupils are conversant with a range of musical techniques. In Year 11, pupils' compositions display competence in work derived from various styles and sources, however compositions are sometimes rather short and repetitive. Pupils in Key Stage 4 successfully use computers for an assortment of musical and writing tasks and this helps to ensure good standards of presentation. Individual instrumental skills are often strong and are used to very good effect in supporting both performance and composition. Overall standards in music are about the same as most subjects in the school. However, GCSE results are below average despite a small number of entries. In part this is due to a limited range of extra-curricular activities in which instrumentalists can take part.

191. Overall, attainment is average at the end of the sixth form. Students' standards of presentation and performing skills are good. Structural considerations, understanding of developmental techniques and discursive argument are less secure and this has an adverse effect on attainment in composition and appraising. In A-Level Music Technology, the available computer resources within the department are well used. Information technology skills in this area are sound. From the beginning of the current school year pupils in the sixth form have been able to pursue their musical interests within the new Performing Arts course.

192. Pupils' attitudes in music lessons are satisfactory. Their response is usually attentive, with appropriate levels of interest, cooperation and behaviour. Pupils work well individually and with enthusiasm in instrumental groups. At Key Stage 3 they co-operate in group composition and are very enthusiastic in performing tasks. Pupils enjoy playing their compositions and respond by listening attentively to the compositions of others. Independent learning skills are developed at Key Stage 4. Pupils at this key stage respond well to classroom tasks and are co-operative and interested. Sixth formers are hard working and diligent. However, there is little development of discursive and critical discussion. The number of pupils opting for music at Key Stage 4 is very modest. Numbers opting for the new performing arts course in the sixth form are good.

193. Teaching is always sound, with significant elements of very good practice. Vocal, keyboard and other musical skills are used to good advantage in the classroom and in extra-curricular activities. Teaching embodies a lively approach, excellent preparation, a range of interesting work, and good organisation. Pupils have opportunities to explore their own culture and value the opportunity to explore world cultures. In a project on Indian Music, Year 8 pupils explored raga with some success. Such work helps pupils to broaden their understanding of other cultures. Pupils are also helped to consolidate their word skills; teachers routinely refer to spelling and technical terms. Instrumental teaching is good. The visiting instrumental teachers make a valuable contribution to the curriculum and their work is carefully managed and integrated into the work of the department. Pupils have the opportunity to take instrumental grade examinations on a variety of instruments.

194. The department is very well organised, with suitable administrative processes in place. The long-term monitoring, assessing and recording of pupils' work are good, and day-to-day assessment is effectively used to develop the work offered to pupils. There has been sound improvement since the previous inspection; resources for a wider range of musical genres are now in place and are used, accommodation is adequate and the main music rooms provide a stimulating and pleasant environment. Teachers are aware of the need to further develop and enrich computer work at Key Stage 3 and have plans to develop the computer provision at all stages so that pupils receive a full entitlement to information and communication technology in music lessons. Unlike most schools of this size, there are no large flag-ship orchestras or bands. However, there is a wide range of extra-curricular activities, most of which are of a high quality. Annual musical productions attract many enthusiastic pupils and standards of performance are reported as being high. Such activities, together with the many small instrumental and vocal groups, such as the samba band and choir, considerably broaden the experience provided by the music within the school. The performance work of pupils is appropriately celebrated in the school and in the community, within a regular calendar of musical events. Such opportunities for pupils to perform have an impact on the prevailing ethos and do much for the kudos of the department and the school. The provision and quality of music in the school is much the same as in 1994.

Physical education

195. Pupils make very good progress in physical education overall. This is due to the very good attitudes pupils and students have to their work and the level of participation they enjoy in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. This leads to attainment which overall is well above average.

196. The 1998 GCSE results were above average. These pupils achieved significantly higher results in physical education compared to other subjects. The 1999 results have improved a little. However, due to an increase in results across the country, they are average compared to results nationally. In 1999 a higher number of pupils than is usual achieved A* grades. Since the previous inspection, the GCSE results have improved steadily. Attainment in A-Level sports studies and physical education has generally been above average over the past 4 years, although not in the higher A and B grades. In 1998 the proportion of pupils achieving higher grades was above average but in 1999 a smaller proportion of students than average achieved higher grades. All pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 consistently achieve a grade which is better than average. Taking account of pupils' performance in lessons and their written work pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 and 4 is above average and in the sixth form is average. At the end of Key Stage 3 pupils attain highly in games, especially rugby, hockey and netball. Boys and girls achieve well in gymnastics. At the end of Key Stage 4 attainment in the GCSE course is above average. This is an improvement since the most recent examination in 1999. Attainment in theory is above average and attainment in much of the practical work is well above average. The attainment of a large proportion of pupils in National Curriculum lessons is above average. Pupils have a good understanding of the principles on which to plan a personal programme of exercise and most pupils take part in rigorous physical activity regularly. The overall attainment of students in the sixth form is above average. Students have a good understanding of the acquisition of skills which is evident in their personal studies. Owing to the high rates of participation in an excellent range of extra-curricular activities, overall attainment by pupils and students is well above average.

197. In Key Stage 3 pupils make good progress overall. It is sometimes excellent, generally good and satisfactory in around one third of lessons. Progress in Key Stage 4 is good and in the sixth form is very good. Throughout the school around forty per cent of the pupils benefit from taking part in an excellent range of extra-curricular activities which includes over sixteen different sporting activities. Many pupils consequently make outstanding progress in their chosen sports. This has an impact on the quality of lessons in physical education. In recent years pupils have achieved county or international honours in eight out of the sixteen sports. Together, therefore, in lessons and through high take-up of extra-curricular activities, pupils and students make very good progress overall. This is due to the high expectations of teachers, very good quality specialist teaching and the positive response of the pupils to the teaching. Attainment, whilst above average in lessons at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 and above average in the sixth form, overall is well above average in response to very good teaching and the high rate of participation in a wide range of extra-curricular sporting activities.

198. In Key Stage 3 pupils improve their games skills and understanding of games in response to teaching that is well-planned and has high expectations of pupils. Pupils increase their ability to take responsibility for learning, for example, Year 9 boys lead parts of the warm up in small groups. However, this practice is not consistent across all classes. Lower-attaining boys make outstanding progress in improving their swimming in response to very good teaching that encourages, motivates and challenges pupils. Pupils make good progress in gymnastics lessons. They improve the complexity and difficulty of their sequences but boys make less progress than girls in improving the quality of their work. This is because many boys wear heavy-soled trainers and there is not always sufficient emphasis on improving quality in the teaching. When progress is satisfactory pupils do not have enough opportunity to evaluate performance or learn to use technical language sufficiently. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because teachers are aware of their needs and adjust activities appropriately.

199. In Key Stage 4 National Curriculum activities pupils make very good progress in improving their overall fitness and learning the principles on which to plan a personal programme of exercise. This is in response to a very well planned programme of health-related exercise. Pupils take part in physically demanding activity regularly and learn how this can contribute to their fitness. Pupils make good progress in learning the theory for GCSE. Lower-attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress in response to well-structured teaching that ensures that pupils learn the technical terms and examination techniques. Higher-attaining pupils make good progress when they apply their knowledge of the bones, joints and muscles in a new situation. Pupils make rapid gains in practical work especially when they are involved in extra-curricular activities. Pupils improve the quality of their GCSE coursework when teachers give extra mentoring and tuition.

200. In the sixth form A-Level students make very good progress in learning the theory in depth. Students respond very well to highly knowledgeable teaching that challenges students to consider the links between practical experience and theory. There are 20 students in the large Year 12 class. However, the class teacher works hard to give students the individual attention they require. Students following the sports vocation course make good progress in learning the skills of sports leadership and improving their personal performance in response to well-planned teaching and high expectations.

201. The quality of teaching is very good overall. Examples of excellent teaching are found in Key Stage 3 and around one third of the teaching is satisfactory. In Key Stage 3 the quality of teaching is good overall. The quality of teaching is very good in both Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The standard of the teaching of examinations and extra-curricular activities is of a very high standard. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject especially at examination level. Teachers ensure that students are very well prepared for examinations. Teachers have additional coaching qualifications that enable them to teach and coach to a high level of performance, both in lessons and extra-curricular activities. Teachers have very high expectations of pupils' improved performance. They expect pupils to complete homework and to work independently on coursework for examinations. Teachers' planning is good. Teachers identify clear learning targets for lessons that they often share with the pupils. However, in Key Stage 3, they rarely refer to the full breadth of National Curriculum requirements. Teachers use a good range of methods in Key Stage 3 and a very good range in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Teachers give very clear demonstrations and explanations. In the best lessons they encourage pupils to evaluate performance and suggest improvements. Teachers ensure that pupils maintain good levels of physical activity in most lessons, but especially in Key Stage 4 lessons on health related exercise. At A-Level teachers use practical experience very well to exemplify the theory. They use probing and challenging questions to develop pupils' understanding. Teachers maintain high standards in the approach of pupils to their work; these are based on mutual respect that ensures that pupils learn effectively. Most lessons move at a good pace with plenty of opportunity to practise and improve. Homework is used effectively in examination work to support progress.

202. In lessons that can be improved teachers miss opportunities to develop pupils' use of the technical language of the subject. Teachers miss opportunities to pose problems, question non-participants, give pupils responsibility for warming up, cooling down or evaluating performance.

203. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very good. Pupils are enthusiastic and want to learn and this has a significant impact on their progress and attainment. Pupils have a good level of commitment to school teams and fixtures. In lessons pupils behave very well, concentrate and listen attentively. The vast majority of pupils and sixth form students carry out homework conscientiously. Sixth form students work very well independently on their individual projects. In lessons pupils readily answer questions but they are less confident about talking to each other about their performance. Pupils co-operate well when practising games or planning gymnastics sequences. They help with equipment and look after it. A significant number of older pupils show maturity and the ability to lead when they coach activities with pupils from primary schools.

204. A significant improvement since the previous inspection has been the increased opportunities for accreditation in sport now offered to students in the sixth form. In addition to the sports studies A-Level, students can follow a sports vocational course. This offers vocational qualifications such as the Community Sports Leader Award, Basic Expedition Leader Award, Assistant Swimming Teacher Award and the opportunity to take a GNVQ in Leisure and Tourism at Intermediate level. Attainment levels and the quality of the teaching have improved overall since the previous inspection. The previous inspection identified the lack of a policy statement for the subject and a lack of schemes of work for Key Stage 4. There has been some improvement but there is still work to do to improve schemes of work and assessment procedures. A shortage of pitches was noted in the previous inspection and this remains the case but within the context of a broad range of facilities. However, the school plans to extend these further to include more football pitches, netball courts and cricket wickets. Day-to-day practice in health and safety is in order, but risk assessment has not been carried out recently.

Religious education

205. Overall rates of progress are good. This is the result of good teaching and the very positive attitudes of pupils. Levels of attainment are above average at the end of Key Stage 3 and in the optional GCSE and A-Level courses. The opportunity to examine pupils' and students' work in compulsory religious education courses in Key Stage 4

and the sixth form was insufficient to allow an informed judgement to be made on their rates of progress or levels of attainment on leaving school. The evidence provided by lesson observations in compulsory religious education lessons suggests that rates of progress are satisfactory.

206. Pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above average in knowledge and understanding of the key features of belief, worship and values in Christianity, Judaism and Islam. They can make personal responses to religious issues which many can support with relevant evidence, and appreciate the way that beliefs are expressed in practical action, for example in understanding the motivation behind the work of organisations such as Christian Aid. At Key Stage 4 in 1999 over two thirds of pupils achieved A*-C grades in the GCSE examination; this represents considerable improvement on the previous year when results were below average. No pupils achieved the highest A* grade. Girls' results are better than those of boys but by a margin smaller than is found nationally. The current evidence indicates that pupils in the present Year 11 who follow the examination course are achieving standards which are average for their age, despite this year group being similar on entry to the school to that of 1998-9. Since 1997, the small numbers of students who have chosen to follow the A-Level course in Christian Theology have all achieved at least an E grade. In 1999, 3 of the 8 candidates achieved the higher A-B grades. The standards being achieved by the two students currently in Year 13 are consistent with their expected examination grades.

207. Progress during Key Stage 3 is good. The scheme of work for the subject in Key Stage 3 ensures that the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education are met; pupils' knowledge and understanding of the main features of Christianity, Judaism and Islam are progressively developed and reinforced through Years 7 and 8 together with their capacity for making personal responses to religious issues. They develop religious skills that are used in Year 9 in investigating the religious dimension in themes such as prejudice and discrimination and the problems arising from the uneven distribution of wealth in the world. Progress is rapid because of the way in which pupils respond to the varied, interesting and sometimes imaginative teaching methods that make particularly good use of audio-visual resources. Teachers are aware of pupils who have special educational needs and ensure that they make similar progress to other pupils by adapting learning resources and because of effective liaison in those lessons where classroom assistants provide extra support. The schemes of work for compulsory religious education in Key Stage 4 do not give sufficient attention to all aspects of the agreed syllabus; in particular, the amount of progress which pupils can make in extending and deepening their knowledge and understanding of Christianity and other faiths which are studied is limited. To a degree, therefore, the requirements of the agreed syllabus are not fully met during Key Stage 4. Pupils make good progress through the syllabus for the optional examination course in Key Stage 4 and consolidate their knowledge and understanding and develop examination techniques in well planned revision lessons. Lively classes are well managed by teachers who have friendly relationships with pupils and have established expectations of classroom attitudes which encourage good progress. Progress is again rapid through the A-Level examination course where students develop good habits of note taking, are well organised and well prepared for classroom discussion. Thorough marking of their work helps them to develop a good understanding of course criteria and shows them how to improve. However, progress overall in the sixth form is satisfactory; there is insufficient time being given to the non-examination course.

208. The overall quality of teaching is good and occasionally very good. Major strengths of the teaching are subject knowledge, the variety and interest of methods in generally well planned lessons, the quality of relationships with pupils which encourages full and active participation in lessons and the effective selection and use of resources. Very good teaching in Year 7 enables pupils to develop their understanding of the importance of the Torah in Judaism. Good planning ensures pupils are very well prepared to write verses on a scroll they have made for themselves and they thoroughly enjoy a practical activity which demands a high degree of accuracy and precision. Understanding is then reinforced and developed further in a highly relevant homework task. Teachers use well selected relevant videotaped material in many lessons and where necessary, ensure that it is edited to maximise effectiveness. Practical activities such as the creation of a video case which illustrates key features of the story of Moses and the use of religious objects and authentic features of a Seder meal generate real interest and encourage pupils to learn. Good relationships are created which gives pupils the confidence to express opinions and take a full part in lessons and their teachers acknowledge the value of their contributions. For example, all pupils in a Year 9 class work in small groups to devise and present performances which illustrate Jesus' teaching on the responsibilities of wealth. Sharp questioning based on very secure subject knowledge ensures pupils remain focused on lesson aims and in most lessons a pace is set which encourages rapid progress. In some lessons, which are otherwise satisfactory, aims are not made sufficiently clear to pupils or they lack sufficient opportunity to reflect on their learning.

209. Attitudes to learning are very good, largely due to the quality of teaching which makes the subject relevant and interesting. Reasonable numbers of pupils choose the optional examination course in Key Stage 4 and the A-Level examination course is increasing in popularity. Levels of concentration are good encouraged by the variety and interest of activity in most lessons. Pupils come to lessons well prepared and take care with the presentation of their work. Files of work in examination classes are well organised. Sixth form students take notes assiduously and pupils in all key stages carefully draft written responses. Relationships are good and often characterised by good humour. Pupils work well cooperatively in pairs and groups in both discussion and practical work. They feel secure in expressing opinions and sometimes spontaneously recognise each other's efforts in performance with applause. Lively groups of older pupils respond well to firm control. Their response to the topics studied in religious educational work and their behaviour in class demonstrates respect for beliefs and values which differ from their own.

210. The subject makes a strong contribution towards pupils' personal development. In Key Stage 4, the otherwise good course in Religious and Social Education which is followed by all pupils does not allow them to study the chosen religions in sufficient depth and consequently limits their progress. There are no procedures for assessing pupils' attainment in compulsory religious education in Key Stage 4. Developmental planning lacks a strategy for evaluating progress towards the set targets. Since the previous inspection, improvements in the quality of teaching in Key Stage 3 have had a positive impact on the standards achieved.

40. **Other courses**

40.

40. **Business studies/economics**

211. The overall level of attainment is above average at the end of Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. In GCSE business studies results were well above national average at A*-C and A*-G grades in 1998 with even better results achieved in 1999. The number of A* awards was below average in both years although this reflects the ability range. A clearer focus on the teaching and selection of materials resulted in a shift from D to C awards. In both A-Level business studies and economics results were above national average in 1998 and 1999 although results especially in business studies have not improved year on year. In 1999 compared with other subjects in the school economics was above average whilst business studies was average.

212. Rates of progress are very good in Key Stage 4 and good in the sixth form. This is due to very good attendance and the positive attitudes of pupils to very good teaching at Key Stage 4 and good teaching in the sixth form. Resources are managed effectively with the focus on improving attainment. Key Stage 4 pupils make very good progress in the GCSE business studies course with evidence of the development of knowledge and understanding. Written work is well presented, accurate, shows precise use of business terms and the ability to classify material and apply elementary theory. The suitability of materials and their continuous evaluation enable pupils to maintain their progress. Pupils with special educational needs are making satisfactory progress, completing assignments suited to their abilities.

213. In the sixth form students make good progress at A-Level in business studies and economics. The development of a critical approach, use of concepts and the application of theory are all positive features especially in the second year. In economics more rigorous materials are included and extracts from economic journals are used to challenge students. The use of case studies in both subjects in the second year provides more opportunities for individual progress. In GNVQ courses in intermediate and advanced business studies students make good progress; in 1999, 16 students took the examination in advanced business, five obtaining distinctions and eight merit awards; ten students took the intermediate examination and two obtained distinction and four merit awards. In both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form the development of numeracy skills is a positive feature. But primarily through lack of opportunity, IT skills remain underdeveloped throughout the department and progress is unsatisfactory.

214. The teaching is very good at Key Stage 4 and good in the sixth form. Programmes of work are well planned with clear lesson objectives that recognise the needs of the examination syllabuses. Teaching strategies including class management are successful but limit opportunities for pupils to explore the topic. The use of materials developed within the department is a positive feature and homework is used as an opportunity to extend pupils' knowledge, e.g. select a local firm and base the study on the previous lesson. But limited use of local industry

impedes the development of research skills, initiative and higher attainment of more able pupils. Marking and assessment procedures are thorough and used to monitor pupil progress.

215. The overall attitude of pupils is very good at Key Stage 4 and good in the sixth form. Pupils have positive attitudes towards their work and this is a very significant factor in their progress and achievement particularly in Key Stage 4. Relationships are very good in different learning situations, characterised by cooperation and sharing ideas and the completion of tasks in well-presented folders is a feature of the work of all abilities.

216. The department is very well led with satisfactory accommodation and good display areas. The stock of books is fairly up to date at departmental and library level but the computer facility is out of date and inadequate and affects the quality of IT delivery within the department.

40. **Additional courses in the sixth form**

217. In addition to those subjects at A-Level and GNVQ referred to in earlier subject sections of the report, the school offers courses at A-Level which attract good-sized groups and almost a half of 13 entries in psychology and just over a third of 14 entries in sociology achieved the higher A and B grades in the 1999 A-Level examinations. During the inspection it was only possible for a small sample of lessons in these subjects to be observed and this was too small to make significant summative judgements. Teaching is generally good and lessons have clear and appropriate aims based on sound patterns of assessment and careful planning. Students appear to be committed and interested and take a keen interest in their work.

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

40. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

218. Time spent in lessons amounted to almost 208 hours. Inspectors scrutinised pupils' and students' work for nearly 21 hours and spoke formally to pupils and students for six hours.

- The team consisted of 17 inspectors, including a lay inspector. It spent a total of 62 days in school during the period of the inspection.
- Some assemblies were observed and a sample of registration periods across the school.
- Inspectors examined the work of a sample of pupils and students from each year group formally and looked at pupils' work additionally during lessons.
- About nine hours were spent observing other activities such as rehearsals, music groups, debating and sporting activities; the pupils' arrival and dispersal to and from school, their movement about school in between lessons, at lunch times and breaks were also observed.
- All documents and materials relating to special educational needs were carefully scrutinised including the policy, individual education plans, the register, resources and related planning and reviewing procedures.
- Some 81 meetings were held with members of staff carrying managerial, pastoral or academic responsibilities and with governors. This amounted to around 75 inspector hours.
- All documentation provided by the school was read. This included policies and schemes of work; pupils' reports; records of achievement; the school's prospectus and sixth form documents; the governors' annual reports to parents; teachers' and pupils' planners; records of work maintained by teachers and minutes of key meetings including those of the governing body and the school's management groups.
- Informal pre-inspection meetings were held with a number of governors, the headteacher and his deputy, the headship team and the staff of the school.
- A parents' meeting was held prior to the inspection attended by 66 parents; a number of written comments, letters and returned questionnaires from 534 parents were analysed. The results of these contacts with parents helped to inform the inspection.

· **DATA AND INDICATORS**

· **Pupil data**

| | Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent) | Number of pupils with statements of SEN | Number of pupils on school's register of SEN | Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals |
|----------|---|---|--|---|
| Y7 – Y13 | 1654 | 26 | 161 | 45 |

· **Teachers and classes**

Qualified teachers (Y7 - Y13)

| | |
|--|-------|
| Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent): | 93.85 |
| Number of pupils per qualified teacher: | 17.63 |

· **Education support staff (Y7 – Y13)**

| | |
|--|-------|
| Total number of education support staff: | 16 |
| Total aggregate hours worked each week: | 449.5 |

| | |
|--|------|
| Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes: | 77.9 |
|--|------|

| | | |
|------------------------------|-----|-------|
| Average teaching group size: | KS3 | 26.26 |
| | KS4 | 23.64 |

· **Financial data**

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Financial year: | 1998-1999 |
| | £ |
| Total Income | 3,594,385 |
| Total Expenditure | 3,520,972 |
| Expenditure per pupil | 2,222.84 |
| Balance brought forward from previous year | (15,716) |
| Balance carried forward to next year | 57,697 |

PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out: 1654
 Number of questionnaires returned: 534 (32.3%)

Responses (percentage of answers in each category):

| | Strongly agree | Agree | Neither | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|----------------|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|
| I feel the school encourages parents to play an active part in the life of the school | 31 | 59 | 7 | 2 | 1 |
| I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren) | 33 | 56 | 5 | 5 | 1 |
| The school handles complaints from parents well | 32 | 53 | 7 | 7 | 1 |
| The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught | 30 | 54 | 8 | 7 | 1 |
| The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress | 33 | 53 | 7 | 6 | 1 |
| The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work | 34 | 57 | 6 | 2 | 0 |
| The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons | 33 | 58 | 6 | 2 | 1 |
| I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home | 27 | 55 | 8 | 9 | 1 |
| The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren) | 32 | 55 | 8 | 4 | 1 |
| The school achieves high standards of good behaviour | 31 | 60 | 5 | 3 | 1 |
| My child(ren) like(s) school | 34 | 56 | 6 | 3 | 1 |