

INSPECTION REPORT

Astley Community High School
Seaton Delaval

LEA area: Northumberland

Unique Reference No: 122374

Inspection Number 184060

Headteacher: M V Lyons

Reporting inspector: Mr R C Drew
7281

Dates of inspection: 27 - 30 September 1999

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
Type of control:	County
Age range of pupils:	13 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of Chair of Governors:	R Watson
Date of previous inspection:	November 1994

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J Edmond, Lay Inspector	Equal opportunities	Efficiency of the school Attitudes, behaviour and personal development Attendance Support, guidance & pupils' welfare Partnership with parents and the community
V Smith W Easterby D Tracey R Humphries	Mathematics English Science Design and technology Information & communications technology	
J Marshall J Tomlinson	Modern foreign languages History Geography	Accommodation Curriculum
J Pickering M Pettitt J Edwards R Wilkins	Art Music Physical education Religious education	Resources Assessment Staffing Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
D Gutmann		Key Stage 4 Sixth form
R Cardinal	Special educational needs	

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MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well

- Teaching is good in all three key stages; much is very good.
- There is good management, with a very clear sense of educational direction. The ability to review and improve is a strength.
- Pupils behave very well and have good, positive, attitudes to school.
- Relationships in school are very good.
- Attainment is above average in English and art at Key Stage 3, and has recently risen to broadly match national averages in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.
- There is very good support and guidance for pupils.
- Partnership with parents and the wider community is very good; information to parents is excellent.
- The ethos in the school is very good: the sense of commitment to high academic and personal standards is clear.
- Day-to-day efficiency is good.
- Many departments are led well or very well.
- Value for money is good.
- The school provides very good access to up-to-date information and communications technology facilities.

Where the school has weaknesses

- I. Act of worship requirements are not met and there is insufficient scope for spiritual development.
- II. The development of an understanding of a wide range of cultures is unsatisfactory.
- III. Capitation is insufficient for a range of departments to acquire basic resources.
- IV. Deployment of teaching staff has some inefficiencies, for example, non specialists are over-used in religious education, modern foreign languages and geography; non-contact time is distributed ineffectively, leaving some senior staff with too many responsibilities for the time available.
- V. A few departments offer less successful provision for pupils: in design and technology, management is barely satisfactory; in modern foreign languages, the new head of department has long-standing problems to overcome.
- VI. Attainment is below average in several subjects at each key stage.
- VII. Aspects of attainment at Key Stage 4 and monitoring of progress lack sufficient rigour: for instance, tailoring support for marginal candidates does not begin until after mock examinations; much course work is not undertaken until Year 11, too late for ensuring that pupils complete in time and when best motivated.
- VIII. There are some inefficiencies in timetabling which disrupt the flow of teaching: these involve split lessons over lunch-time and some confusing changes made since the start of this autumn term.

This is a good school in which the strengths are very marked and involve the central activities of teaching, management and the response of pupils. Strengths far outweigh weaknesses. The governors' action plan will set out how the weaknesses identified during the inspection are to be tackled. The plan will be sent to all parents or guardians of pupils at the school.

How the school has improved since the last inspection

The school has made good improvements since the last inspection. It has greatly improved the range of teaching and learning styles used and the provision for information and communications technology. There have been major improvements in aspects of management, in the curriculum and the effectiveness of tutors and provision for pupils with special educational needs. Too little progress has been made on provision for a daily act of worship and for spiritual development across the curriculum.

The capacity for future improvement is very good. This reflects the recent good track record in changing areas of weakness and the ability of managers to engage all relevant parties in the process of improvement.

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 1998:

Performance in:	Compared with all schools	Compared with similar schools	Key
			well above average
			above average
			average
Key Stage 3 Tests	A	A	C
GCSE Examinations	C	C	D
A/AS – levels	D	N/A	E

Using test results from 1998 and previous years as well as pupils' work observed during the inspection, standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are average in most subjects. They are above average in English and art, but below average in modern foreign languages, physical education and information and communications technology.

At the end of Key Stage 4, overall standards are above average in media studies and drama; they are broadly average in most others, but are below average in modern foreign languages, design and technology, music and art.

At the end of post-16 education, attainment is above average in information and communications technology and economics. It broadly matches the national average in most other subjects but is below average in art and in design and technology. Standards are well below average in modern languages.

Quality of teaching

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Year 9	Good	Good in majority	Satisfactory in information and communications technology, modern foreign languages, music.
Years 10-11	Good	Good in majority	Satisfactory in music, modern languages
Sixth form	Good	Very good in art, economics, media studies and GNVQ subjects; good in most others	Satisfactory in design and technology, modern foreign languages, music
English	Good		
Mathematics	Good		

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

Teaching for the school as a whole is good: it was satisfactory or better in 98 per cent of the lessons seen. It was good in 45 per cent of lessons and very good or excellent in 18 per cent. In both key stages and the sixth form, teachers display strong subject expertise and very good relationships with pupils.

Other aspects of the school

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	Very good: pupils are pleasant, friendly and respectful; behaviour is very good both in class and around school.
Attendance	Good. The global figure of 91 per cent is satisfactory, but prompt attendance at all lessons is excellent.
Ethos*	Very good: there is a clear commitment to high standards, and this is effective in many respects, especially pupil behaviour.
Leadership and management	Good: the Headteacher and senior management team offer very clear leadership; many departments are well led; very many aspects of support and monitoring are good, though there is also scope for improvement; whole-school planning is good.
Curriculum	Satisfactory at all key stages, with some strengths, such as the provision of GNVQ courses and enrichment for pupils with special educational needs; some weakness persist, such as modern foreign languages time allocation and course structures at Key Stage 4.
Pupils with special educational needs	Provision is well organised. Good progress is made in Key Stage 4 and at post-16.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	Satisfactory overall: IX. Spiritual development is given too little emphasis X. Moral development is well provided for XI. Social and cultural development have satisfactory provision, though developed.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Satisfactory overall: there are many very well qualified staff; resources are good at whole-school level but insufficient in some departments.
Value for money	Good. Spending is high, due to the school's initiative in seeking extra funds; teaching and management are good; attainment is sound and improving; pupil behaviour 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

- XII. The school is approachable
- XIII. Their children like school
- XIV. The school enables children to achieve high standards
- XV. The school encourages parents to be involved in school life

What some parents are not happy about

- XVI. Information received on pupils' progress
- XVII. The approachability of the school
- XVIII. Standards achieved
- XIX. Homework

Inspectors strongly support these and other favourable views expressed by parents. On the issues where a minority (ten per cent of the 63 questionnaires returned) are less happy, inspectors find that:

- XX. information to parents is excellent;
- XXI. homework is well used compared with schools nationally;
- XXII. standards are satisfactory and improving;
- XXIII. approachability is seen as a strength by 90 per cent of parents and this is supported by evidence gathered by the inspection team.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

In order to raise standards further, the governors, Headteacher and staff should:

I. Improve provision for the spiritual development of pupils by planning opportunities and exploiting those which occur unplanned. Specifically provision should promote these features across the curriculum:

- time for reflection;
- appreciation of beauty and the significance of discovery;
- discussion of fundamental matters to do with the purpose and meaning of pupils' lives.

(paragraph 55)

I. Raise the level of books and other day-to-day essential materials in the art, information and communications technology, design and technology, religious education, mathematics, modern languages and English departments so that staff and pupils are given further support in their pursuit of high standards across the full range of activities in these subjects.

(paragraph 93)

II. Improve the match between non-contact time for the senior managers and the allocation of responsibilities so that even greater scope is provided for monitoring and supporting the work of subject departments. Specifically greater focus should be given to:

- overseeing improvements in the management of design and technology;
- offering even greater encouragement to the process of improvement underway in modern languages;
- ensuring, as agreed, that all subjects bring forward into Year 10 the monitoring of pupil performance and the meeting of coursework requirements now predominantly in Year 11;
- ensuring all departments work to agreed departmental development plans.

(paragraphs 20, 79, 81, 96, 142, 156)

I. Improve the efficiency with which teaching staff are deployed by:

- reducing the use of non-specialist teaching in modern foreign languages, religious education, geography;
- distributing non-contact time available to heads of department more consistently;
- correcting a range of timetabling features and late rooming changes which tend to disrupt the continuity of lessons either side of lunch breaks and leave staff unsure of the deployment of colleagues.

(paragraphs 96, 97)

In addition, the school should take action to improve the following: the provision for increasing pupils' experience of a wide range of cultures; meeting statutory requirements for a daily act of worship and religious education in the sixth form; improving assessment arrangements in modern foreign languages; building greater use of information and communication technology into the curricular planning of departments.

(paragraphs 62, 54, 196, 155, 147)

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the school

1.The school is a 13-18 community high school with 694 pupils on roll, including 169 in the sixth form. It is situated in Seaton Delaval, about 10 miles north of Newcastle upon Tyne, and serves the village itself and a growing range of outlying settlements, and some nearby towns such as Blyth and Cramlington. This broadening of the area from which pupils come reflects rising rolls: total numbers were 650 in 1994 but are projected to be 740 by 2001.

2.The vast majority of the pupils are white, with just six pupils coming from ethnic minority communities. Boys outnumber girls by 357 to 337. About ten per cent of pupils are on the special educational needs register, including about three per cent of pupils with specific statements. Baseline assessments used by the school suggest that attainment on entry varies but broadly matches national averages.

3.Pupils come from a variety of backgrounds. While historically the area served by the school area has been dominated by the coal industry, it is now largely a commuter area focusing on Newcastle, though one large local employer is based in the village. Fifty four pupils are eligible for free school meals. Indicators on the proportion of parents with higher educational qualifications, children in over-crowded households and other similar factors suggest that pupils' backgrounds are broadly similar to those found nationally.

4.Since the last inspection, the school has changed status. It ceased to be grant maintained in September 1999. A new Headteacher has led the school since 1995 and a significant number of other appointments have been made at senior management and head of department level.

5.The school's main aims are to:

- promote education for life with the school as a learning centre at the heart of the community;
- provide the best possible learning environment for pupils and adults;
- prepare pupils for citizenship and the world beyond school;
- foster high achievement and high expectations for each individual;
- emphasise the importance of personal responsibility and respect for others.

1.Currently it is focusing on:

- raising attainment, especially that of boys, in Key Stages 3 and 4;
- enhancing the post-16 curriculum;
- further improving extra-curricular provision;
- significantly extending and improving community education;
- reshaping the structure, roles and responsibilities of the senior management team.

Key indicators

Attainment at Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for latest reporting year:		Year 1998	Boys 97	Girls 81	Total 178
National Curriculum Test Results		English	Mathematics	Science	
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or Above	Boys	78	63	58	
	Girls	74	54	41	
	Total	152	117	99	
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	87	65	55	
	National	65	60	56	
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	49	38	24	
	National	35	36	27	
Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science	
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or Above	Boys	38	45	41	
	Girls	60	51	48	
	Total	98	96	89	
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	67	65	61	
	National	62	64	62	
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	24	36	14	
	National	31	37	31	

Attainment at Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest Reporting year:		Year 1998	Boys 94	Girls 88	Total 182
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	31	89	90	
	Girls	45	82	82	
	Total	76	171	172	
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	42	94	95	
	National	44.6	89.8	95.2	

Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and percentage of <i>such pupils</i> who achieved all those they studied:		Number	% Success rate
	School	0	n/a
	National		n/a

Attainment in the Sixth Form ⁴

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 who were entered for GCE A/AS examination in the latest reporting year:	Year	Male	Female	Total
	1998	20	30	50

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	15.6	14.5	14.9	0.3	1.5	0.9
National	n/a	n/a	17.6	n/a	n/a	2.8

Number entered for the IB Diploma, and percentage of <i>such students</i> who achieved this qualification:		Number	% Success rate
	School	0	n/a
	National		79.1

Number in final year of approved vocational qualifications and percentage of <i>such students</i> who achieved these qualifications:		Number	% Success rate
	School	16	50
	National		75

Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year:	Authorised	School	%
	Absence	National comparative data	7.8
	Unauthorised	School	7.9
	Absence	National comparative data	0.1

Exclusions

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year:	Fixed period	Number
	Permanent	29

Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:	Very good or better	%
	Satisfactory or better	21
	Less than satisfactory	98

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

Attainment and progress

1. Standards of attainment for the school as a whole are average and there is satisfactory progress in both key stages and the sixth form.

2. At the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is broadly in line with national averages and expectations. In National Curriculum assessments in 1998, attainment in English, with 87 per cent of pupils at level 5 or above (national figure: 65 per cent), was well above average; in mathematics, standards were above average and in science they broadly matched the national figure. These standards were closely mirrored by the school's 1999 results. Compared with similar schools, the standards in 1998 for English, mathematics and science were collectively above average. However, over the formal three-year reporting period of 1996-98, performance by pupils in these subjects was close to the national average.

3. On the basis of pupils' work observed during the inspection, standards in English are above average. Pupils are good at listening to other people's ideas; they enjoy reading for pleasure. Most are good at appreciating the plot in texts and they spell and punctuate accurately in their written work. In mathematics, current Year 9 pupils are competent at solving equations and calculating the volume of compound shapes. They retain a sound grasp of basics concepts such as angle properties and the areas of simple shapes. In science, standards are average. A good proportion of pupils can classify sound in terms of amplitude and frequency; all can set up onion cells for microscopy and their investigative and experimental skills are suitably secure, reflecting the increased attention now given to this aspect.

4. Amongst the other subjects of the curriculum, attainment is above average in art; it matches expectations in most other subjects, but is below average in modern foreign languages, physical education and information and communications technology.

5. By the end of the Key Stage 4, overall attainment again broadly matches national averages. While in recent GCSE examinations, standards are below average, current Key Stage 4 pupils are demonstrating average attainment in many subjects. In 1998, 42 per cent of candidates obtained five or more A* to C passes compared with 45 per cent nationally, and this level of performance was sustained in 1999. These results suggest that standards are average compared with those of similar schools. Since the last inspection, results have fluctuated widely: for example, 44 per cent of pupils gained five A* to C passes in 1994, but only 31 per cent the following year. The figure rose from 30 per cent in 1997 to 42 per cent in 1998. However, evidence from current Years 10 and 11, as well as the 1998 and 1999 results, suggest standards have stabilized. This is in keeping with the much improved assessment and pupil tracking systems introduced in 1996 and applied with increasing effect over the last four years.

6. Taking both examination results and current work into account, standards in most subjects match national averages: this is true for mathematics, science, English, geography, history, religious education, information and communications technology and physical education. In art, music, design and technology and modern foreign languages, standards are below average, but in drama, business studies and media studies, they are above average.

7. At the end of the sixth form, standards broadly match national averages. Average point scores for students have varied greatly since the last inspection, ranging from 18.3 in 1995, when the national figure was 15.9, to 9.9 in 1997, but back towards the national average in 1998 and 1999. The changes reflect at least two factors: the removal of high entry requirements in 1995, and the gradual improvement in monitoring student progress which began soon afterwards and in the last two years has steadied and improved results. For individual subjects, standards of attainment are above average in information and communications technology, and economics. They are broadly average in mathematics, science, music, English, geography, history, religious education, GNVQ courses and media studies. Standards are below average in art, design and technology, physical education, and well below in modern languages.

8.While girls' attainment exceeds that of boys in Key Stage 3 and significantly so in Key Stage 4, the discrepancies in the 1998 results are less than those found nationally. However, it is to the school's credit that in-service materials and events are being used, amongst other techniques, to help improve boys' attainment.

9.Progress for pupils and students as a whole is satisfactory. This is the case in both key stages and in the sixth form. The attainment of pupils entering the school in terms of standardized national tests and Key Stage 2 results is broadly average, though their subject-specific knowledge and skills in some areas are lower than this. Consequently, the school is enabling pupils to make sound progress in continuing to match national standards at the end of the key stage. In physical education, there is very good progress in addressing a significant skills deficit, and there is good progress in art and English. In modern foreign languages, progress is not yet satisfactory.

10.In Key Stage 4, sound progress overall is reflected in most subjects. However, progress is good in art, information and communications technology, and religious education, while in physical education, it is very good. It is unsatisfactory in modern foreign languages.

11.Progress in the sixth form is again satisfactory overall, but there is much which is good. In mathematics, music, design and technology, geography and art, progress is satisfactory. It remains unsatisfactory in modern foreign languages, but there is good progress in religious education, physical education, history, English, science, and the General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) subjects, while students make very good progress in information and communications technology and economics.

12.Pupils and students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 4, setting arrangements offer more support, allowing good progress to be made. The small number of students in the sixth form with special educational needs are also given helpful guidance on course selection and strong support from subject teachers; this allows them to make good progress.

13.Standards of attainment and progress largely reflect good teaching across the school and levels of prior attainment which are average or below. Where continuity across Key Stages 2 and 3 in subject content is relatively strong, as in English, the school enables pupils to achieve well. In mathematics and science, pupils arrive at the school with less prior knowledge and Key Stage 3 tests reflect this. However, the school is taking steps to improve these cross-phase links. Despite sound or good teaching, some subjects cannot make up the skills deficit within a year, and attainment remains below average in modern foreign languages, information and communications technology, and physical education.

14.Attainment and progress also reflect the effectiveness of departmental management. Some departments have had several years of strong leadership and teaching which have motivated pupils and established high expectations. Others, for example modern foreign languages and art, have had little continuity in leadership. Standards in art are rising rapidly under new leadership. They are beginning to do the same in modern foreign languages but remain hindered by a lack of specialist teaching and an insufficient time allocation. Design and technology standards and management are barely satisfactory. A range of subjects perform less well than they might at Key Stage 4 since they are slower than most schools to begin course work. Marks for this component nationally tend to increase overall standards for pupils, but the tendency is less marked in this school. Indeed, course work depresses results in some subjects. The late start leads to more haste as deadlines approach and more missed deadlines; the opportunity is missed to build on the very strong commitment of pupils in Year 10, the first year of their course.

Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

15.Pupils have good, positive attitudes to learning. Most concentrate well in class, are attentive and show interest in their work. They recognise that they are in school to learn and arrive in the classroom with minimal disruption and the appropriate equipment. They work independently with confidence to solve problems, though there is a notable reluctance to speak a foreign language in class. They persevere and settle well to completing the task in hand. They have a strong desire to improve their work and take pride in the finished product. This is especially evident in some of the very professional documents produced in media studies lessons and in the effort put in to presenting high-quality computer work in English. Sixth formers display enthusiasm for their chosen course work. Pupils can select and use appropriate resources with confidence, for example when preparing anti-drug posters.

16. Behaviour in the school is very good. The school's expectations are very high and it has developed a range of well thought-out policies and procedures, which emphasise the importance of discipline and self-discipline, backed by an effective schedule of sanctions and rewards.

In lessons, pupils are courteous and trustworthy and have respect for each other and staff, and this typifies the very good relationships found in the school. They behave well and the school can rely on a sensible, mature approach from sixth formers. The school is an orderly community. Pupils are well mannered in the dining hall and walk quietly round the school. Their behaviour when waiting to enter a classroom and at the end of lessons is very good. They are consistently courteous to staff and visitors, holding open doors and reacting politely when addressed. There is no graffiti and very little litter. There were 32 exclusions last year, of which three – all boys - were permanent. This is a low figure and the trend remains static. Exclusion is the ultimate sanction, reserved for extremely serious offences.

17. The school's policy on bullying and racism is very firm. The measures it has taken include an anti-bullying assembly for Year 9 very early in the first term. Pastoral staff deal swiftly with any incident. The atmosphere in lessons is pleasant and teachers treat pupils with the respect they expect in return. Pupils relate very well to each other in lessons and around the school, and there is no hint of racial tension between the majority and the small ethnic minority.

18. Pupils are making satisfactory personal development. They show initiative in offering to support others: for example, in a German lesson sixth formers were observed helping Year 10 pupils. They work collaboratively in many lessons and by the time they have reached the sixth form, students have developed a sound capacity for individual study. Pupils take up opportunities for personal development outside lessons, such as drama and musical performances and taking part in charitable events. Sixth formers have a community service option, which is well supported. The school listens willingly to sensible suggestions from pupils for other activities.

19. The last inspection report indicated that several policies, notably that relating to bullying, were still under development. Now that they have been fully implemented, it is clear that the standards of behaviour they promote makes a very positive contribution both to pupils' attainment and to the quality of life in the school.

Attendance

20. Pupils' attendance continues to be satisfactory. The attendance rate was 92.1 per cent in 1997/98, which was broadly in line with the national average. It fell slightly in 1998/99 to 91 per cent, the increase in authorised absence being ascribed to a higher rate of sickness. Unauthorised absence at 0.3 per cent still remains well below the national average. Satisfactory attendance has a positive effect on pupils' attainment and progress. The legal requirements for recording and reporting attendance are met. Pupils are consistently punctual at the start of the day and when returning from breaks.

21. Attendance levels have not changed significantly since the last inspection. Staff now carry out attendance checks at individual lessons.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

Teaching

22. Teaching is good overall and a strength of the school. It was satisfactory or better in 98 per cent of the lessons observed during the inspection, and in 45 per cent it was good. Eighteen per cent of lessons had very good or excellent teaching. It is consistent in quality across both key stages and the sixth form.

23. In Key Stage 3, about 95 per cent of teaching is satisfactory or better, with 51 per cent good and 11 per cent very good or excellent. The five per cent of unsatisfactory teaching represents very occasional lessons across several subjects, with a slightly higher incidence in modern foreign languages. The overall quality of teaching in subjects is generally good. This is true for mathematics, science, English, physical education, design and technology, religious education, geography, history and art. Teaching is satisfactory in information and communications technology, modern languages and music.

24. In Key Stage 4, 98.5 per cent of teaching was satisfactory or better with 47 per cent good and 16 per cent very good or excellent. Teaching in modern languages and music is satisfactory overall, but good in all other subjects.

25. In the sixth form, no lessons with unsatisfactory teaching were observed. The quality was good in 48 per cent of lessons and very good or excellent in 27 per cent. The vast majority of subjects have good teaching, but in art it is very good, while in modern foreign languages and music it is satisfactory.

26. A great many features of teaching in the school are good. There is strong subject expertise in all key stages. In many subjects this is very pronounced and only rarely is lack of expertise a problem. Expectations of pupils are high: teachers provide challenging work for most pupils. Time and resources are used well. Day-to-day marking is done well and is generally constructive, and homework is used effectively. A very successful aspect of teaching is pupil management. Staff generally establish very good relationships with their classes. There is clear mutual respect, good use of praise and encouragement and very strong evidence that teachers enjoy working with pupils and students. In turn, pupils react very positively to this approach. Part of this successful interaction is based on the use of a wide range of teaching strategies and approaches: in addition to good exposition by teachers, there is more scope for pupil involvement than usual; paired and group work is common; role play and active participation by pupils are well used.

27. Planning is satisfactory. While day-to-day plans are well organised, medium and longer-term ones often lack the broad guidance that a good departmental development plan should offer: but many departments do not have these.

28. Frequently, the strengths of teaching come together to produce work of very good or excellent quality. For example in an excellent English lesson with Year 9 the teacher showed first rate subject expertise; he made very helpful references to previous work on character studies, and then explained with great clarity the tasks for the lesson. Pupils of all abilities achieved a great deal because this fine start to the lesson was followed up by very effective use of assessment, so that the teacher was sure precisely what progress pupils were making and how praise, correction and additional challenge should then be used.

29. In a very well taught Year 10 science lesson, the key features were the fine relationship between teacher and pupils and the clear structure to the lesson. The teacher used a wide range of strategies, demonstrating crucial principles about arteries and veins, prompting pupils to recall information by imaginative questioning and arranging labels on the board. The pace was very good and the lesson prompted a very positive response and good progress from the pupils.

30. Student involvement was crucial to an excellent GNVQ lesson with Years 12 and 13. The teacher very effectively organised the lesson so that principles of evaluation used by the board could be learnt by students through assessing each other's induction assignment. The teacher very successfully explained the process and gave excellent individual support to students as the lesson progressed. Very high expectation and pace were maintained through carefully targeted questioning of students.

31. Rarely, when teaching is less successful it is generally because there is too little security in subject knowledge. For example, this was the case in a poor Year 11 French lesson in which the great majority of instructions were given in English; similarly, in an otherwise satisfactory lesson with Year 10 too much of the French used by the teacher was translated into English. A poor structure or lack of variety of activity can occasionally be a problem. For example in a Year 9 music lesson with unsatisfactory teaching, the information given was relevant but involved over extended sections in which pupils were passive: the teacher's expositions were too long and pupils could not get involved in activities or respond to questions.

The curriculum and assessment

32. Overall, the curriculum is satisfactory, with some strengths and a smaller number of weaknesses. The curriculum policy, dated March 1998, provides a clear rationale and specific aims for the school. It stresses a broad entitlement and choice within, not between, the areas of learning that the school has identified. The information provided to parents in each year group is clear and informative. The teaching time of 25 hours and 50 minutes is generous and the school offers a broad and generally balanced curriculum.

33. Key Stage 3 pupils have a common core that includes English, mathematics, science, design and technology, modern foreign languages, history, geography, art, music, information and communications technology, religious education, physical education, personal and social education and a tutorial period. Drama, information and

communications technology, CASE (Cognitive Ability and Science Education) and careers are taught as part of a carousel along with other elements of personal and social education. A second modern foreign language, German, is taught to pupils with strong commitment and/or high attainment. In Key Stage 4, pupils follow a curriculum that can lead to General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSEs) in ten subjects. There is a core curriculum that includes English language and literature, mathematics, double-award science, design and technology and a modern foreign language. In addition, all pupils have lessons in physical education, personal and social education, religious education and a tutorial period. Pupils have to select three other courses from an arts block, that includes art, drama, media or music; a humanities block that includes history, geography or religious education; an open block, that includes business studies, child development, German or physical education. In the sixth form, there is a good range of A-level courses with GNVQ courses in business, engineering, leisure and tourism and health and social care. There is also a well-considered general studies course. This provision is reasonably broad and balanced.

34.The time allocation for some subjects in Key Stage 3 is very low. For example, history, geography, art and music only have four per cent of the time and this is an absolute minimum in order to cover the National Curriculum programmes of study. Information and communications technology is taught as a discrete subject but the arrangements for monitoring the teaching and use of information and communications technology in all areas of the curriculum are poor. In the sixth form, there is no religious education for all students and this is in breach of the statutory requirements.

35.The school has undertaken a number of curriculum reviews and continues to discuss and consider new arrangements. As a result, the curriculum is more balanced now than at the time of the previous inspection. However, there are still concerns in modern languages with the arrangements for Key Stage 4. The 50 period timetable gives opportunities for flexibility but the arrangements for lunch result in too many lessons being split across the lunch break. This is inefficient and provides poor learning opportunities.

36.All pupils enjoy satisfactory access to the curriculum and opportunities are generally available to all. The second modern foreign language is available to those pupils with high prior attainment and/or strong commitment. The arrangements for physical education sometimes result in large differences in the number of boys and girls in particular groups. This is inefficient and leads to unbalanced groups in terms of size and gender.

37.Provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Individual education plan targets are specific and measurable and subject teachers make good use of them, particularly in Key Stage 4. Appropriate course choices and the materials used within them provide good support to the small number of sixth form students with special needs.

38.Planning for progression and continuity is satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The change from middle school to high school at the end of Year 8 raises many issues for the high school and these have not been effectively resolved. There are regular meetings with middle school colleagues but too many departments do not credit prior learning and ensure a smooth transfer in curriculum terms to Year 9. There is repetition and the study of topics that are more appropriate to Year 7 in some subjects, for example history and geography. The progression from Key Stage 3 to 4 and into the sixth form is good with clear advice and good support.

39.The school teaches sex education through its programme of personal and social education (PSE). The policy is several years old but is thorough and provides a good framework. The health education policy is still in draft form and involves a number of people including the school nurse and guidance and welfare staff. The policy is implemented effectively and this is an improvement since the last inspection. The school's off-timetable (intervention) days are a useful device for extending the range of PSE and add to its relevance for pupils. The alternative medicine day for Year 12 is a good example of the creative thought and care that has gone into the planning.

40.The arrangements for careers education are good. Careers is taught as part of the PSE carousel and includes work experience in Year 10. The careers library is small but well used and also serves as an office for the careers staff and interview room for the careers officer. There are good links with the careers service. The links with employers are mainly through the work experience scheme and the placement programme that is being developed in the sixth form. These links are not extensive. Given the lack of any clerical support for the careers department and the fact the careers teacher has other responsibilities and teaching duties, these arrangements are demanding and could be better focused.

41. There are good opportunities for pupils to participate in extra-curricular activities. These are very good in physical education, where there is a wide range of sports and fixtures. There is a very high participation rate in these activities. The school leases a cottage in the wilds of the Cheviot Hills at Milkhope and this is a good feature, especially for Year 9 pupils. There is a school choir, band and rock band. The annual production is a good feature of school life, involving many pupils and staff. In July, all Year 9 and 10 pupils are offered the opportunity to participate in a wide range of activities to broaden their experience and expertise. Currently, sixth form geography students are planning to attend a convention in New York in January 2000.

42. The school procedures for assessment are clearly documented and provide an efficient process in which staff, pupils and parents are fully involved. The school complies with the statutory requirements for recording National Curriculum assessments and for the requirements of pupils with special educational needs. The procedures for assessment are satisfactory in Key Stage 3 and good in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.

43. Pupils enter the school with assessment records of varying quality. Through a rigorous tracking programme in Year 9, a range of data, including nationally recognised diagnostic tests, Key Stage 2 School Assessment Tests (SATs) and a post-Christmas exam, is collated and analysed to provide effective assessment in most subjects. At several stages during Year 9 under-performing pupils benefit from a system of action plans, enhanced by interviews with parents and mentors.

44. The tracking of assessment continues into Key Stage 4 and includes an excellent 'progress project action plan' in which parents and staff again combine to support pupil achievement. Where teachers mark for the examining boards, as in English, assessments are particularly accurate. In the sixth form the practice of acquiring baseline information on students is becoming established, and is built on by regular subsequent assessment across the curriculum.

45. The quality of reports is good. In Years 9 and 10, parents receive two reports, of which the second, the interim report, is particularly detailed and helpful. A single page is given over to each subject. In addition to detailed written comment, helpful indications of key subject-specific criteria and grading are provided. Sixth form reports are provided after internal examinations. Teachers' commentaries are very detailed, but specific targets for improvement are not included. There is no whole-school marking policy, though departments have their own systems: there are too few constructive comments on pupils' work in Key Stage 3 and pupils are not consistently clear about how to improve.

46. Overall, there is satisfactory use of assessment information in the school. However too little use is made in subject specific planning. This partly reflects the absence of comprehensive development plans for most subjects. There is good practice in English, where regular feedback of exam findings informs regular curriculum changes. In mathematics, it is used to determine sets. At whole school level the position is stronger: this was a weakness at the time of the previous inspection, but within the last four years systematic arrangements and improved use of data have brought about significant gains and are bringing many benefits to the school. Staff are aware that more reliable data on middle-ability pupils is needed in Key Stage 3, as are earlier predictions about Key Stage 4 performance, and have taken steps to introduce systems to meet these needs.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

47. Although the school makes satisfactory overall provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, it has not effectively addressed some of the issues of the previous inspection report. There is still no whole-school policy or agreed approach to the ways in which pupils' development in these areas should be addressed in all subjects in the classroom, nor has the school addressed its legal responsibility to provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

48. The school's provision for the spiritual development of pupils is unsatisfactory. Pupils attend a year group assembly on one morning of the week. There is still no provision on other days of the week. Assemblies continue to be primarily administrative, moral or social in tone. Year 9 to 11 assemblies during the inspection week lacked any of the characteristics of worship, and were devoid of Christian, religious or spiritual content.

49. The school does not plan systematically for pupils' spiritual development in the classroom. Where there is good practice, it is as a result of individual departmental initiative. For example, in English, pupils explore poetry,

evoking a response of wonder to the mysteries of nature, while in mathematics the study of tessellations prompts Year 9 pupils to discuss 'The Maker'. Pupils explore their inner feelings in art, music and religious education.

50.The school makes good provision for the moral development of pupils. It has clear values, which find expression in its code of conduct, and in its discipline, anti-bullying, drugs awareness and equal opportunity policies. Teachers are good role models for pupils. Pupils know right from wrong, and their behaviour, and relationships with each other are very good. The morality of caring for others finds practical expression in the support given to charities.

51.Pupils have the opportunity to address moral issues in some lessons. Sex education and drugs awareness are included in the PSE programme. In English, pupils explore issues relating to the role of women and stereotyping, while in history they are challenged by issues of racial prejudice and anti-Semitism in a study of the Holocaust. In geography, they explore environmental issues, and in religious education, issues of relationships, and treatment of the disabled in society.

52.The school makes satisfactory provision for the social development of pupils. The merit system gives public recognition to pupils' achievements, and fosters their sense of self-worth. Pupils have good opportunities to develop their social skills through membership of the wide range of sports clubs and teams, and participation in after school activities.

53.Pupils in Year 9 share a residential experience at the school's field study centre. Sixth form pupils support younger pupils in their work in art, and help with the Christmas party. Pupils are widely encouraged to develop skills of collaborative working in the classroom, for example, in design and technology.

54.Pupils meet social issues in a limited number of subjects. In chemistry, for example, they explore issues of pollution, and in history discover the social impact of the industrial revolution. They meet urban problems in geography, and the impact of affluence and poverty on life style in child development.

55.The school makes satisfactory provision for the cultural development of pupils. They are able to learn musical instruments and to sing, and to develop their skills through the choir and bands. The annual production provides large numbers of pupils with the opportunity to make music and to act for an audience. Pupils are also able to take part in visits to concerts, theatres and art galleries.

56.Some subjects introduce pupils to different cultural traditions. In English, they study texts from other cultures, and in mathematics, different number systems. In geography, they meet the lifestyles of different countries. Art introduces pupils to Japanese, African, Aztec and aboriginal culture. Religious education introduces them to the major world faiths. In general, however, the school does not do enough in lessons or through display and events to make pupils regularly aware of the multicultural nature of contemporary British society, or of the contribution of cultures other than the Western European to the development of present day civilisation.

Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

57.The school is very effective in the support and guidance it provides and in concern for their welfare. This makes a positive contribution to educational standards and helps pupils to feel happy and secure. The school has a welcoming and friendly atmosphere. All pastoral staff know their pupils well and pupils confidently turn to them for help. Parents appreciate the school's close liaison on pastoral matters with the feeder middle schools and the very good arrangements for introducing new pupils in Year 9. The arrangements for transfer to university, college or training for employment ensure that pupils move on with confidence.

58.Procedures for monitoring pupils' progress and personal development are good. Heads of year and form tutors retain pastoral care of their charges for three years, which ensures continuity. They keep a detailed track of expected GCSE results from the time the pupils join the school, and pupils are well supported in their learning and personal development. There is an extensive and well-conducted PSE programme, including work experience and careers education, which contributes substantially to pupils' personal development and awareness of the world around them. The school runs an extensive drugs awareness programme and cooperates actively with parents in helping prepare pupils for examinations.

59.Procedures for monitoring and promoting discipline and good behaviour are very effective. Staff have high

expectations of good behaviour and promote an orderly and cheerful atmosphere throughout the school. Even though the last inspection report praised the school's measures in this area, the school has this term introduced a new assertive discipline policy to improve further on its existing high standards.

60. Bullying is rare and both pupils and parents are happy that inappropriate behaviour is dealt with rapidly and effectively. The school makes its intentions clear right from the start by holding an assembly on bullying very early in Year 9. Good arrangements, which conform with legislation, are in place for child protection. Pupils are taught to work and play safely and are well, but unobtrusively, supervised in class and around the school.

61. The school generally complies with legal requirements for health and safety procedures, though not enough adults are on duty during some swimming lessons, notably in Year 9. Provision for medical care and first aid is good. The school liaises effectively with outside agencies in supporting pupils with special educational needs or health worries.

62. The last inspection report raised no areas of concern in welfare and guidance. The present facilities generally continue to serve the best interests of pupils.

Partnership with parents and the community

63. The school's very good partnership with parents and the community is mutually beneficial. This is reflected in the encouraging and welcoming tone of the school's policies and documentation. Parents find the school easy to approach and support its aims.

64. The information to parents about the school is of an exceptionally high standard. Even though neither the prospectus nor the governors' report to parents totally meets statutory requirements, both documents are very informative. There is a comprehensive induction pack and an informative parents' handbook for each year group. The school is currently re-launching a twice-annual newspaper, 'The Astley Standard', to keep the whole community more closely in touch with its activities.

65. There are regular parents' meetings, and the school encourages informal contact from parents at any time. It also holds very well-attended meetings for the parents of those studying for GCSE to tell them how to help their children with coursework and with preparation for examinations. Parents appreciate the progress reports and the extensive opportunities for two-way written communication provided by the homework diary. The annual written reports meet statutory requirements. They tell parents what their children know, understand and can do and helpfully evaluate their progress. The quality of reports on sixth form students is excellent. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are properly involved with the review of their children's progress.

66. Parents are invited to a range of music and drama performances and sporting events. The parents' association arranges a small number of well-attended fund-raising events, generating a useful income for the benefit of their children.

67. The school has strong links with the local community, particularly through the shared library and the youth club and through its contacts with senior citizens, which include a daily invitation to eat their dinner at school.

68. The Seaton Valley partnership of schools has forged close links between all members. Astley pupils benefit from this cooperation, especially where baseline assessment and induction are concerned. The schools are currently preparing a development plan to strengthen links, especially in the area of curriculum.

69. Over the last few years, the school has been extending the opportunities for pupils to benefit from contact with the outside world, for example the wide variety of outside speakers invited to its alternative medicine, money management and work experience preparation days. All pupils in Year 10 have the opportunity of two weeks work experience and some members of Year 12 take part in career-related work shadowing. There is a good range of outside visits in art, English and geography, and several external speakers contribute to pupils' religious education. The school is currently developing an enterprise education plan with the intention of working closely with up to 24 organisations.

70. The last inspection report indicated that links with parents and the community were strong. The school has

continued to build on its earlier achievement. As shown in the positive responses to the questionnaire and at the parents' meeting, parents welcome the improvements and continue to hold the school in high regard.

THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

Leadership and management

71.The school has good overall leadership and management and some aspects are very good. The Headteacher and other senior managers work particularly effectively with governors to ensure a very clear sense of educational direction for the school. Aims are well chosen and effectively communicated to staff, parents and pupils. This is partly because the process of discussing aims involves far more consultation than is commonly found, with parents and pupils, as well as governors and staff, playing significant roles. Familiarity with the central purpose and specific objectives of the school is also high because its reviewing of these matters is frequent and thorough.

72.Managers support and monitor teaching and the curriculum well. Clear line management responsibilities are defined and regular meetings take place to monitor progress. Helpful documentation is produced on key areas, for example, teaching and learning styles and proposed modifications to the curriculum, and adequate time is set to present these to staff and allow proposals to be properly considered.

73.Many beneficial changes to the curriculum and to assessment arrangements continue to be made and the school has improved greatly in this area since the last inspection. The only aspect of monitoring which is inconsistent in its impact is the line management of departmental work by senior management. Much of their monitoring activity is very successful and has supported many heads of departments in raising standards. It is less effective in a few respects: for example, it has not ensured the same high-quality leadership in design and technology as is commonly found in the school; in several subjects it has yet to achieve the earlier start and higher standards in course work at GCSE, despite advice and suggestions. In modern foreign languages, monitoring has not led to appropriate action on the curriculum and use of non-specialist teachers.

74.Despite these areas of relative weakness, the school is generally good at implementing its aims and values and the great majority of its policies. This reflects good relationships between staff and between pupils and staff: morale is high and there is a desire to improve and make things work. The quality of communication is also a positive help: meetings and documents involve staff at every level and use a range of styles which promote clear understanding. Reviewing policy implementation is part of standard practice in the school and ensures that the vast majority of policies work effectively or are changed.

75.Development planning is of a good standard. Indeed, at whole-school level it is a marked strength, with far better evaluative procedures than usually found. Aims are clear and appropriate. Strategies for achieving them are precise and realistic, and costings and timings ensure that intentions lead to beneficial change at a good pace. Most subject departments, while effective in many aspects of their work, are not drawing together their proposals for improvement into systematic plans which match the structure and effectiveness of those used at whole-school level.

76.As a result of the many strengths in management at every level, the school has a very good ethos. The commitment to high standards of attainment and behaviour is very strong. Much of this is already being achieved but where it is not, the commitment to improvement is impressive.

77.Special educational needs provision is well managed. Despite the discontinuity in leadership of this area, the current coordinator has established effective systems for assessing, recording and dissemination of information to colleagues. Individual education plans are in place, helpful and generally well used by subject teachers. Links with parents are effective. There are too few support assistants to provide the level of support and pupils need.

78.The governors of the school are particularly well informed about broad policy and fine detail in the school's work. They contribute far more than in most schools to the processes of formulating aims and implementing operational decisions. They have yet to meet the statutory requirements for religious education in the sixth form, a daily act of worship and formal appraisal procedures. However, since the last inspection governors have been very successful in helping to frame the school's strategic aims, improve curricular and pastoral provision in the school, and have overseen some very beneficial appointments at senior and middle management levels.

79. Since the last inspection, the school has made good improvements on the majority of key issues in the report. The capacity for future improvement is judged to be very good because of the strengths in management: both the systems and the will to improve are there and the track record is good.

Staffing, Accommodation and Learning Resources

Staffing

80. There are sufficient staff to meet the demands of the curriculum. The match between qualifications and subjects taught is good but in modern foreign languages, geography and religious education, non-specialist teaching has an adverse effect on standards of attainment. Turnover of teachers has been high over recent years but a number of recently appointed teachers, including newly qualified staff, are enthusiastic and hold key posts in the school. The quality of staff in middle-management posts is good with the exception of design and technology. Men hold a higher proportion of the most senior posts but otherwise the gender balance is fair. There are two deputy Headteachers, who are also heads of departments. They also line-manage departments and spend an above-average time teaching. The amount of non teaching time varies between staff and there is no consistency as to its allocation.

81. A special educational needs coordinator has recently been appointed and offers support within the classroom. Two additional support staff give support but this is not enough to satisfy the needs of the school.

82. Much training takes place on training days and has consisted of whole-school priorities. This has been positive but the professional development needs of individual teachers within their subject areas have been lacking. Departmental support for newly qualified teachers is good and greatly appreciated. Induction procedures for new teachers to the school are not formalised. Most staff have completed the first stage of appraisal, but this has ceased over the past year. Recently appointed staff have received no appraisal and in this respect the school is in breach of statutory regulations.

83. There is appropriately qualified technical support in art, design and technology and science. The administrative and clerical staff make a positive contribution to the smooth running of the school along with the caretaking and ancillary staff. The school takes students from higher education institutions for training and appreciates their work.

Accommodation

84. Accommodation is adequate for current needs and the standard of it is good. The original buildings are showing signs of wear but they are well maintained and free from graffiti. Classrooms and some public areas are made more attractive by good quality display. Outside, the grounds are litter-free, if unstimulating. In recent years, the school has been successful in its bids for funding, which have provided new science, design and technology and information and communications technology facilities, and a swimming pool and library for joint use with the community. Accommodation for science, English, design and technology, information and communications technology and physical education is very good. For drama and religious education it is barely adequate, and in both subjects, good teachers have to improvise with the rooms at their disposal, so that they are hindered rather than helped as they strive to offer pupils opportunities to achieve at the very highest levels.

Resources

85. Overall resource levels for the school are satisfactory, and in some respects good, but the capitation allocation to departments is unsatisfactory. Spending on information and communications technology hardware and software, and on the modern library has been high in recent years. The library is distinctive in being one of very few that are managed jointly by the school and the public library service. The ground floor is mainly reserved for the public, while the school makes most use of the first floor. When funding permits, the installation of a lift between the two floors will allow equality of access to both the school users and the public. The issuing of books and stock control is computer controlled. There is a very good stock of fiction but in many cases there are insufficient reference books of quality to support Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 or post-16 study. Access to the Internet through a large number of computer work stations is a feature of the library. The school subscribes to the Local Education Authority (LEA) schools' library service and has access to 3000 items, including books,

computer programs and prints, each year. Access to the British Library is also possible through the public library service. Ninety five per cent of the school pupils are members of the library, as are 2289 members of the general public.

86.The school spends 8.3 per cent of its income on learning resources, which compares favourably with the national average of around four per cent. The school's spending includes the financing of information and communications technology in some areas of the school. Last year, just over £200,000 was spent on resources, but the forecast spending for 1999-2000 year is a much lower figure of £121,000.

87.The allocation of funds for departmental capitation is decided by the management steering group. At £40,000 this figure is low and is the direct result of a policy decision to spend more on staffing to allow smaller class sizes, particularly in the sixth form. Thus, many departments receive inadequate funding. Some departments, such as physical education, history and GNVQ, are sufficiently well funded for them to provide their pupils with good learning resources and others such as geography are satisfactorily resourced. However, several other departments, including mathematics, design and technology, modern languages, art and religious education have poor or very poor provision of learning resources. For example, just over £3,600 is given to the design and technology faculty to resource art, resistant materials, electronics, food, graphics and the teaching of GNVQ in these areas of the curriculum. This allowance is preventing the satisfactory development of the curriculum in design and technology and art. The resistant materials course depends almost entirely upon recycled materials. The art department is unable to offer the pupils any real experience of working with three-dimensional processes or textiles. In English and art, pupils are encouraged to subsidise the departments by buying their own texts and sketchbooks, while in modern foreign languages there is a marked lack of appropriate text books. The inadequate resourcing of these departments adversely affects both the delivery of the curriculum and the learning of the pupils.

The Efficiency of the School

88.For the school as a whole, efficiency is satisfactory.

89.In terms of financial planning, the school budget is handled well. Spending is carefully matched to the educational priorities set for the whole school and additional income is successfully generated to pay for the many areas which the basic budget would not cover. While year to year carry-over figures appear to vary widely, this actually represents successful planning to fund future building work or other areas of heavy expenditure. At departmental level, a significant number of subjects do not have development plans: matching spending to agreed targets is thus less effective than the practice at whole-school level. Overall, however, financial planning is satisfactory.

90.The use of teaching and support staff is unsatisfactory. A majority of teachers are deployed effectively, but there are still too many situations in which pupils are taught by non-specialists. While temporary factors and the relatively small size of the school are a partial explanation, the experience of pupils is adversely affected, particularly in modern foreign languages and religious education. Achieving consistency of approach is also difficult when one subject has a larger number of teachers than is ideal, for example in Key Stage 3 geography and religious education provision. Timetabling also currently leaves some staff with widely differing amounts of non-contact time. Some members of the senior management team and heads of department have insufficient time for the work load they carry. Elsewhere, it is hard to staff physical education with suitable group sizes, even though specialist physical education expertise is under-used. Support staff are appropriately deployed.

91.There is satisfactory use of learning resources and accommodation. Most teaching areas are in heavy use each day; productive use is made of the library. Few resources are left unused by staff. However, the exceptions are important: in physical education, timetabling can lead from under-use of gyms or changing areas in one lesson and double-booking of changing facilities the next, and the swimming pool remains heavily under-used.

92.Day-to-day administration and financial monitoring are good. All tasks are quickly and effectively carried out and regular monitoring of school and departmental budgets take place and ensure that a shared and accurate picture is available at all times.

93.The school gives good value for money. Efficiency is satisfactory: the school provides good teaching and management; pupils achieve broadly in line with national expectations, with rising trends at all key stages; and there is very good behaviour in the school. While spending is above average, this reflects the school's success

in bidding wisely for additional funding.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

English

94. Standards of attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 are above average. In the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is well above average compared with national scores and compared to similar schools. Pupils do better in English than in mathematics and science, and attainment is rising, with 87 per cent of pupils attaining level 5 and above and 49 per cent attaining level 6 and above in 1998. Teachers assessed attainment as lower than this. Pupils cooperate well in groups. They listen to other people's ideas and make their own suggestions sensibly. High attainers employ a wide vocabulary whilst low attainers express themselves clearly. Boys as well as girls enjoy reading for pleasure. Most appreciate the plot of pre-twentieth century poetry such as 'The Pot of Basil', and many read it with understanding. High attainers write convincing dialogue and low attainers set out script appropriately. Most spell and punctuate accurately. In drama, pupils construct and perform scenes, creating and relaxing tension.

95. Standards of attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 are average. In the GCSE examinations, attainment is in line with national averages at grades A* to C but below them at A* to G. In 1998, 48 per cent of the cohort gained grades A* to C in English and 60 per cent of the entry in literature, several at the highest grades. Pupils do better in English than in most of their other subjects and attainment is rising. High-attaining pupils write perceptive, atmospheric narratives and criticise literature incisively. They can compare the methods used by Taylor and Dickens, using extensive textual reference. Low-attaining pupils understand the effect Mr Birling has on the other characters in 'An Inspector Calls' and identify common themes in poems from other cultures. High-attaining pupils have a wide, sophisticated vocabulary both on paper and orally. Lower attainers produce structured work but are not always able to adapt their language to written tasks. Orally, they do not develop their ideas sufficiently. Though many pupils still enjoy reading independently and for pleasure, many do not and find it hard work, especially amongst the boys. Pupils' response to literature is better than their written competency. Pupils are used to drafting and improving their work. Many use a computer for their final draft, improving presentation considerably. At both key stages, girls' performance is better than that of boys. The department is employing some strategies to remedy this.

96. In the sixth form, standards are in line with course expectations. Results in A-level examinations are improving rapidly, with 44 per cent of students gaining A or B in 1998. Students respond to a wide range of texts and genres, much wider than their set texts. High attainers analyse 'Mansfield Park', perceptively. They use technical terms with accuracy. Lower attainers know their texts well and select detail appropriately. Some are reticent to express their thoughts to the whole class but will contribute in smaller groups. All have the confidence in varying degrees to prepare work independently and report back to the group.

97. At Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form, pupils make good progress. At Key stage 4, progress is satisfactory. At Key Stage 3, in the short time pupils are at Astley, progress is good. Use of paragraphing and spelling improves, description becomes more evocative and vocabulary develops. In oral work, pupils' confidence increases. Shakespeare texts are well prepared, using a range of interesting methods and examination practice for SATs develops the ability to work accurately under pressure.

98. At Key Stage 4, progress is satisfactory. Many pupils make good progress, especially those who are hard working and conscientious. Work of a greater length and complexity is produced, and literature texts studied become more complex. The commitment of some pupils falls off, especially boys. Too many fail to fulfil coursework requirements or are not entered for GCSE. The department is putting strategies into place to remedy this.

99. In the sixth form, progress is good. Students tackle far more demanding texts such as 'Captain Corelli's Mandolin', learning to persevere even when finding it hard. By the end of the key stage, they enjoy the challenge of comparing texts of their own choice, producing some excellent, mature responses. Their ability to analyse in depth and detail increases, as does confidence in their own interpretations.

100. The progress of pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. They are given individual help and much encouragement. Adapted resources are available, though not used sufficiently.

101. Pupils' response is good at all key stages, but especially so in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. Pupils are friendly, polite and get on well with each other and their teachers. They work cooperatively in pairs and groups. Their social and moral development is encouraged by sensitive discussion about values and attitudes.

102. Teaching is good. It is never less than satisfactory and often very good or excellent. Teachers are highly committed, with very good subject knowledge and awareness of examination requirements, working well together to improve their teaching and raise standards. Management and discipline are very good and teachers use a wide variety of teaching methods. The best teaching uses group and paired work skillfully to ensure all pupils are appropriately challenged. Resources are stimulating and the pace swift, with pupils moved on from task to task so that much is covered in the hour. Pupils in Year 9 made very good progress analysing in groups, from a variety of sources, which applicant was most suitable for a post in a children's home. Where teaching is less effective, pupils spend too long waiting for the next stage in the task, becoming less focused and less productive, or work is pitched to the middle of the ability range, with insufficient thought given to the range within the classroom. On occasion, a shortage of resources is detrimental to progress. For example, in independent reading lessons, there is a shortage of exciting, bright new books. The new library is beginning to have some effect in this area. Homework is used effectively in the sixth form but is less rigorous lower down the school.

103. Assessment is good, and used to encourage progress at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, but is less well used at Key Stage 3. The curriculum is broad and balanced, fulfilling statutory requirements. Flourishing drama and media studies courses give it an extra dimension.

104. This is a good department, very well run, which has made good progress since the previous inspection both in raising standards of attainment and in developing standards of teaching.

Literacy

105. Though the school has no policy to develop pupils' competency in literacy and oracy across the curriculum, some departments are making effective contributions.

106. The whole-school spelling policy is developing greater awareness of words used in different subjects. New and subject-specific words are displayed prominently and effectively introduced, for example in food technology and art, where the term parallelogram was effectively taught. Spellings are corrected in accordance with the policy, helping to raise standards. There are insufficient opportunities for extended writing, though pupils do compose poems in music. Planning and drafting is encouraged in some areas, but the practice is not widespread across the curriculum.

107. Pupils listen well and speak confidently, and are given regular opportunities to develop ideas through group and paired work. In physical education, for instance, pupils are involved in regular discussion and evaluate each other's performances. In science, role play is used effectively to promote greater understanding of disease.

108. Pupils read well enough to conduct independent research, and many use the library and the Internet, for example when conducting geographical fieldwork.

Mathematics

109. At the end of Key Stage 3, overall levels of attainment in mathematics are in line with national expectations across all aspects of the National Curriculum. In the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of the key stage the proportion reaching or exceeding level 5 is slightly above the national average, and in line with the results achieved by similar schools. The proportion of pupils attaining the higher grades is below the national averages. Levels of attainment in mathematics classes and homework match national standards across most of the National Curriculum but pupils have only limited experience of using and applying mathematics within an extended investigation. In class, higher-attaining pupils reach standards above national expectations, for example, in using algebra with confidence to solve problems in geometry.

110. At the end of Key Stage 4, the overall standard of attainment in mathematics is in line with that achieved nationally. The proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades in the 1998 examination is slightly above the national

average, and is close to the national figure in 1999. These results represent an improvement on comparable entries at the last inspection. Taken over the last four years, there is an upward trend in the average point score gained by pupils in GCSE mathematics. Low attainers are not always entered for GCSE but most are successful in the Associated Examining Board (AEB) numeracy tests. In class and coursework, pupils have equal competence in all aspects of mathematics. Smaller classes and focused teaching enable low attainers to consolidate basic mathematical skills and, by the end of Key Stage 4, they have a good grasp of topics such as simple data analysis, graphical work and proportional fractions. Pupils satisfactorily carry out several in-depth mathematical studies and some attain the very highest standards, for example, a pupil developing the binomial theorem from an investigation of $(1+x)^n$.

111. At the end of post-16 education, the overall standard is in line with the national expectation. The proportion of pupils in 1999 attaining pass grades in the A-level examinations remains in line with the national average. However, the proportion attaining the higher grades fell from that attained in the previous two years to well below the national average and also that achieved at the time of the last inspection. Class and coursework of current sixth form pupils is in line with national expectations, with several pupils working at levels equivalent to those required for the highest grades. Pupils are particularly confident in statistics and are able to apply their knowledge of statistical methods to practical investigations reflecting their other interests, for example, into a study of the kicking power of boys in the north-east in comparison to thigh circumference and physical training.

112. Progress is satisfactory in mathematics across all the key stages. During the final year of Key Stage 3, whilst pupils are progressively developing new mathematical skills, such as solving equations, calculating volumes of compound shapes, and using two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional objects, they also consolidate the more basic concepts acquired in the middle schools, such as angle properties and areas of simple shapes. During Key Stage 4, pupils progress satisfactorily across all the aspects of mathematics included in the GCSE syllabuses. The progress of higher attainers in the manipulation of algebra is good and pupils progress, for example, from solving simple linear equations in Key Stage 2 to finding the solutions to quadratic and simultaneous equations, as well as using graphical calculators with confidence and accuracy. Similarly, lower attainers make good progress, for example, in understanding proportional percentage increases and decreases; a skill that has many everyday practical applications. Throughout the A-level course, pupils make satisfactory, and sometimes good, gains in knowledge and understanding of the wider aspects of mathematics, such as trigonometry, calculus, use of vectors in mechanics, and the more complex statistical methods used in scientific and commercial analysis. Their skills in the manipulation of algebra are quickly extended in the early part of the course to, for example, solving simultaneous quadratic equations. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory and, in some cases good progress, across Key Stages 3 and 4.

113. Pupils' behaviour in mathematics is good. In lessons, pupils concentrate well and are keen to answer questions. Particularly impressive is the keenness of low-attaining pupils in Key Stage 3 to complete their work accurately and quickly. Pupils of all abilities and ages take care with the presentation of their work and homework is usually, but not always, completed on time. All pupils respond well to the merit award schemes and short-term lesson targets. Few opportunities are given for group or paired work within mathematics lessons but, when appropriate, pupils do collaborate and support each other, for example, in a lesson on equivalence of fractions, decimals and percentages. All pupils show respect for their teachers and a willingness to ask for help when in difficulty. Many Year 11 pupils attend revision lessons in the Easter holidays and most sixth form students are pleased to take up the opportunity of after-school help sessions. However, even in the sixth form, students are very dependent on their teachers and do not take sufficient responsibility for their own learning.

114. The quality of teaching is good. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen and there was a high proportion of good lessons and some instances of very good teaching. Classroom teaching is characterised by a positive working ethos that is sustained throughout the lesson. Without exception, all the teachers have good subject knowledge. They are all keen to share this knowledge and frequently give up their own time to help pupils with difficulties. Pupils are assessed regularly and this information is used to place pupils in ability groups and to identify long-term targets. Teachers are keen that every pupil fully understands each step of the work and consequently, as the spread of ability in each set is frequently wide, the pace is sometimes slow for the more able of any group. Providing a range of different tasks to match pupil's needs is not sufficiently developed in these lessons. In this respect only, teachers' expectations are not always high enough. Teachers use questioning effectively and target the questions appropriately to ensure all pupils are making progress. In order to help to motivate their pupils, teachers make good use of regular marking and short-term targets linked to merit awards. Individual lessons are planned satisfactorily within the framework of sound schemes of work.

115. Sufficient time is allocated to mathematics and the addition of mechanics to the A-level sixth form options

ensures a better balance and breadth to the mathematics curriculum. However, the inclusion of both Years 12 and 13 together in this option is not satisfactory, particularly as it results in a very large group, and progress is being affected. A sound action plan is in place to improve attainment in mathematics in all the public examinations and to reduce the comparatively high level of non-entries to GCSE. The overall leadership and management of the department is good, with appropriate use of staffing and available resources. However, there is a shortage of textbooks and many of those in use are worn and dated. This is having an adverse effect generally on pupil progress and particularly of the high attainers in Key Stage 4. There is also a lack of resources for the use of information and communications technology within the teaching of mathematics. There is a commitment to improving further the range of teaching styles but, as yet, this initiative is not fully supported by subject-specific teacher training or the monitoring time to ensure effective implementation of the development plans.

116. Since the last inspection, attainment and progress in mathematics has been sustained in line with national standards and there have been improvements in teaching and planning.

Numeracy

117. As yet, there is no overall numeracy policy for the whole school, but pupils can and do apply their knowledge of mathematics within other subjects. For example, GNVQ students can interpret and use a variety of techniques, including pie and bar charts and scatter diagrams, for the display of statistical information. However, lack of other mathematical skills is having an adverse effect on the progress of a few sixth form students in their GNVQ engineering course. Elsewhere, there is evidence of sound levels of numeracy. For example, regular use is made of graphical skills in science and geography. In science, pupils are able to manipulate formulae and in science and design and technology, pupils are able to carry out a range of measurements and record them accurately. All pupils are able to carry out straightforward mental calculations, although there are a few who still do not know all of their multiplication tables, and all pupils can use a basic calculator when appropriate. Higher attainers can use scientific and graphic calculators.

Science

118. Pupils enter the school with attainment broadly in line with the national average. In Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests in 1998, pupils' attainment compared with all other schools was close to the national average. Compared with schools in a similar context, pupils' performance at the end of Key Stage 3 was below average. Over the last three years, performance in terms of average national curriculum levels was close to the national average, with little difference between boys and girls. Results in 1999 were similar, indicating that the department is maintaining standards at this key stage.

119. At the end of Key Stage 4, in 1998 the percentage of pupils achieving grades A* to C at GCSE was below the national average. Results in 1999 were similar in terms of A* to C grades but were above the national average for grades A* to G.

120. A-level results in 1998 were broadly in line with national averages overall. In 1999, the pass rate was high in all three A-level sciences, though relatively small numbers of candidates were involved.

121. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' attainment is average for their age. Over this key stage, pupils are making satisfactory progress in relation to their attainment on entry to the school. They are acquiring satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the different sciences. For example, higher-attaining pupils were able to classify sound in terms of its amplitude and frequency. Pupils of average ability were able to prepare a slide of an onion cell for microscopy, whilst lower achieving pupils were able to test solutions with universal indicator solution to see if they were acidic or alkaline. Pupils' progress in investigative and experimental science in this key stage benefits from the department's increasing emphasis on this attainment target.

122. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' attainment is also average for their age. These pupils are also making satisfactory progress, consolidating their knowledge and understanding of important scientific concepts and theories. For example, higher-attaining pupils have a good knowledge of the function of the heart, arteries and veins in relation to the circulation of blood. Pupils of average ability have a sound understanding of kinetic and potential energy and are able to estimate them from the appropriate formulae. Lower-attaining pupils were able to prepare copper sulphate crystals by reacting copper carbonate with sulphuric acid. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress towards the targets set for them as a result of the individual attention given by the class teacher.

123. Attainment in the sixth form is average. Students in this key stage make good progress acquiring the analytical and experimental skills necessary for success. For example, a Year 12 chemistry group was able to prepare and purify cyclohexene by the dehydration of cyclohexanol.

124. Throughout the school, pupils and students are interested in their work. They sustain concentration well. They are courteous to adults and are well behaved in class. They carry out practical experiments with due regard for their own and others' safety. Good relationships have been built up between pupils and teachers. The overall attitude to learning is good.

125. Teaching is good overall. Very good teaching was observed in each of the three key stages. Lessons are well planned and time and resources are used effectively. Teachers have good expectations of standards and behaviour. They have a good command and knowledge of their subject specialisms and are becoming more expert at delivering the science curriculum. They are improving progress in the classroom by adopting different teaching strategies and methodologies such as accelerated learning. However, there is some variability in day-to-day assessment through the marking of pupils books. In a minority of lessons, the work is directed at the middle, impeding the progress of higher attainers. However, teaching overall is a strength of the department.

126. The science curriculum is broad, balanced and well planned to meet statutory guidelines, but the time allocation in Key Stage 4 is less than that recommended. This leads to problems in completing the course. Schemes of work are good and are an effective means of delivering the science curriculum. The department makes a valuable contribution to the provision of cross-curricular information and communications technology. Pupils' work is assessed well as they progress through the key stages and these assessments accurately inform subsequent provision made for pupils.

127. Accommodation and learning resources are sufficient for the delivery of the science curriculum, although not all pupils in Key Stage 4 have their own textbook. Displays of work in the department help to promote the subject by engendering interest and scientific curiosity.

128. The department is well managed both strategically and on a day-to-day basis. The teachers work well together as a team. The technical staff have clearly defined roles and work hard and efficiently to ensure that the department runs smoothly. Measures to ensure safety through risk assessment are good.

129. Since the last inspection, the department has introduced a range of policies and curricular developments. It has improved liaison with its contributory middle schools. These elements are now working together to improve the delivery of the science curriculum.

OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

Design and technology

130. Pupils enter the school in Year 9 with levels of attainment which are below the average for pupils of a similar age nationally. Some also have limited experiences in a variety of different material areas. By the end of Year 9, their levels of attainment are below national expectations in lessons, but basic skills in the accurate use of equipment are developing, especially in food technology. Terminology and the understanding of the design process are also beginning to be used effectively in planning simple design-and-make activities. The teachers' high assessments of the pupils' design and technology capability at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 are not reflected in the attainment seen in lessons in Years 10 and 11, especially in electronics and resistant materials.

131. Standards for design and technology as a whole at the end of Key Stage 4 are below average. Graphical communication results at GCSE for the past three years have been either in line with national averages or slightly above; food technology results were above national averages in 1998 and in line with the school average in 1999. However, results in electronics and resistant materials for the past three years have been well below the national averages and school average for A* to C grades.

132. Attainment at the end of the sixth form is below average. It is below the national expectation in A and AS and GNVQ engineering, though in GNVQ health and social care, pupils are able to use their analytical and information

and communications technology skills effectively to design questionnaires as part of a health promotion campaign. The making and graphical skills of pupils are generally more advanced than their designing and evaluative skills.

133. Progress is better in making than in designing and is satisfactory overall at the end of Key Stage 3. Pupils are steadily gaining in confidence and can use a variety of tools and equipment effectively and accurately, especially in food technology, for example, when testing and evaluating different types of equipment to make coleslaw. Pupils concentrate on mastering basic skills through teacher-directed activities and this has helped to develop a good understanding of the properties of materials and their usage, especially in model making in resistant materials. The need to cover basic skills in Year 9 has affected individual opportunities for creativity but progress has been made in developing an understanding of technical terminology. Progress through Key Stage 4 is good in graphics and food technology in both designing and making, with pupils developing the ability to evaluate their ideas and improve their investigation skills. Lower attainers have difficulty in communicating their ideas and graphical skills are less well developed. The higher-attaining pupils in electronics are making satisfactory progress and have mastered the complexities of designing simple circuits. The higher-attaining pupils taking A-level graphical communication are making satisfactory progress but the lower attainers have difficulty in developing detailed and workable solutions to their ideas. Pupils of all ages with special educational needs make satisfactory progress but often enjoy and achieve more in their practical work.

134. Pupils' responses to their lessons are nearly always good. The majority show good powers of concentration and listen attentively in lessons; they follow instructions carefully and are keen and interested. Their confidence is gradually improving through the key stages, they are very willing to share responsibilities and they work well in pairs and groups. Homework is usually completed but there is some lack of urgency in lessons to complete tasks on time. All are enthusiastic when participating in practical activities, most display good organisational skills and many take pride in the presentation of their work. Pupils at all levels of attainment respond positively in practical lessons and most can give clear oral detailed explanations of what they are making. In the sixth form, pupils are beginning to develop the capacity for independent study. All pupils value their teachers' support and encouragement, and behaviour in lessons is very good.

135. At all key stages, the overall quality of teaching is good. It is of very good quality in just over a third of the lessons observed, good in just under half, and satisfactory in the remainder. The quality varies between subjects within the faculty, and mirrors standards of attainment: teaching is strongest in graphical communication and food technology, and satisfactory in electronics and resistant materials. All teachers have good knowledge and skills within their specialism; some have high expectations and plan effectively for differentiation and progression. Homework is set regularly and generally marked frequently in detail, with constructive comments. There is no common system of marking across the department, though the same assessment procedures at the end of Year 9 are used by all design and technology teachers. The failure to moderate in depth has resulted in some over-estimating of pupils' capabilities. In Years 9 and 10, teachers concentrate on teaching good basic skills successfully but sometimes this, and the shortage of consumable resources, has prevented individual creativity from developing. Teachers use realistic and relevant illustrations to assist the pupils' understanding of the manufacturing industry and the wider influences of the technological society. The management of pupils is very good and pupils are highly valued by their teachers.

136. While there are some strengths in management of the department these are outweighed by shortcomings and the overall position is barely satisfactory. The curriculum is quite well organised but there is no offer of textiles, despite strong staff expertise in this area, and there is a lack of detailed planning for future developments or evaluation of schemes of work. The limited resources are well managed but the lack of consumables is restricting the range of projects offered and the opportunity to experience and use more technical equipment. The lack of a comprehensive structure for marking and assessment across the department has been detrimental to raising levels of attainment and examination results in some material areas. Marking and assessment and evaluation procedures are good in food, child development and in some graphic groups, but weak in other areas of the subject. With the very good support of the technician, the spacious accommodation is well maintained and managed. Insufficient use is made of the open display areas to promote quality work and provide exciting stimulus for the pupils.

137. Since the last inspection, pupils now all take a design and technology option at Key Stage 4. Assessment procedures have been developed but pupils' attainment has yet to be reviewed and targeted carefully for improvement in some material areas. There is evidence of good planning for pupils' varied needs in food technology and graphics. Capitation has decreased and has restricted the use of a range of materials, and there is still no textiles taught.

Information technology

143.

138. On entry to the school in Year 9, pupils have had widely varying experiences in information and communications technology and their attainment is below that of pupils of a similar age nationally. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is still below national expectations but the pupils are beginning to develop good basic skills. In the 1999 National Curriculum teachers' assessment, only a small percentage of pupils gained level 5 or above, but at the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is in line with national averages. Those students currently taking A-level information and communications technology are, in the main, achieving above the national standard, especially in their knowledge and understanding and use of different types of software. Students taking GNVQ courses in business and health and social care are using information and communications technology very effectively and confidently to support their coursework. Spreadsheets are used to work out pay slips, design questionnaires and produce promotional material for health promotion projects. In science in Year 9, all pupils use control software for data logging and in English, there is evidence of high-quality word processing. The Internet is used widely by all pupils but especially at Key Stage 4 and post-16 for individual research for projects in geography, history and religious education, where pupils gain information also using CD-Roms. The open access to hardware across the school is a contributory factor in improving pupils' attainment. In 1998, a small group took information studies GCSE and all gained grade C or above, with two candidates gaining A*. Four candidates passed A and AS level computing.

139. Progress through Key Stage 3 is satisfactory, with pupils mastering new skills and using them successfully in other subject areas. Good progress is made at Key Stage 4, with the majority of pupils growing in confidence and using their skills to research and investigate in a variety of subject areas. Progress at post-16 is very good, especially with those pupils taking A-level information and communications technology. Although many subjects encourage pupils to use information and communications technology, several have not built this into their planning and do not monitor progress or capability effectively.

140. Pupils are very well motivated and most are keen to use the very good facilities. Concentration levels are high and pupils with special educational needs pupils delight in producing good-quality work. Pupils' technical understanding develops quickly, especially in the sixth form, where mature students work independently and value the scope of the hardware. Pupils appreciate the help given by teachers, the network manager, support teachers and their peers. Across the key stages, the majority of pupils can work independently to use the facilities to research, investigate and present ideas for project work. Many take great pride in the presentation of coursework, especially at GCSE and post-16.

141. Overall, teaching is satisfactory. At all key stages, specialist teaching in the discrete lessons is nearly always good and occasionally very good. All these teachers have good subject knowledge, are confident in their delivery and plan lessons thoroughly. The schemes of work have been regularly evaluated and modified. Teachers' expectations are high and lessons are generally well placed with a good mixture of instruction and activity. However, across the curriculum as a whole while some teachers are competent in supporting pupils' usage of information and communications technology, others have had insufficient training and are less effective. The assessment of pupils' information and communications technology work is not yet built into departmental planning and the pupils are not fully informed of their information and communications technology capability.

142. The delivery of information and communications technology meets the statutory requirements at both key stages. Recent restructuring of the course content and the time allocation has been effective. Examination courses are currently being introduced in Year 10 and there are A-level groups taking information and communications technology exams in the Year 2000. School hardware for teaching is very extensive: apart from the teaching rooms, some departments have their own network clusters and the library is very well equipped and well used. The organisation and management of the department is very good. Since the appointment of the information and communications technology coordinator, audits have been done of hardware and software and staff in-service needs addressed. Liaison has taken place with the feeder schools and great efforts are currently being made to improve the progression from middle to high school. New hardware has been installed and money and equipment has been obtained from industry. A detailed development document has been written but not thoroughly costed. The network manager is a great asset to the smooth running of the department. Hardware is plentiful, but the capitation allowance for the taught curriculum and for the delivery of information and communications technology across the curriculum is low.

143. Since the last inspection, control technology has been delivered in science for all pupils and there have been some improvements within modern languages with the introduction of the video conferencing facility. In-service training has been effective in improving teachers' capability but more is still needed as new hardware and

software is introduced. Expenditure in updating and replacing equipment has been extensive, though some departments lack subject-specific software. The taught courses have been reconstructed to meet present day needs, but assessment and recording procedures are not yet fully integrated into the teaching of information and communications technology. New examination courses have been introduced at Key Stage 4 and post-16.

Modern foreign languages

144. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' attainment in French is below that expected nationally. Pupils enter Year 9 with varying experience, so that some momentum is lost. German is started in Year 9, as a second foreign language, and although performance cannot be expected to reach national standards in only one year, the level achieved is still low. In Key Stage 4, attainment in both languages is even further below what is expected nationally. The proportion of pupils gaining A* to C grades has shown no improvement since 1996. In the same period, boys' results have been considerably below national expectations and are disproportionately lower than those of girls. In the groups of below-average attainers, boys account for two-thirds of the class. German results are considerably below national expectations, and, as with French, boys' results are much worse than those of girls. Few pupils take modern foreign languages in the sixth form, so national comparisons are not possible. Nevertheless, only two pupils out of eleven have failed since 1996.

145. Within this overall picture, attainment is weakest in speaking, particularly in Key Stage 4, where pupils are most reluctant to participate, in spite of the efforts of teachers. When pupils do reply, it is rarely more than a phrase; and this is usually mispronounced and incorrect. Pupils spend too little time developing reading skills. Writing consists too frequently of copying and grammatical exercises. Only the coursework element of the GCSE course is of a sufficiently high standard. On entry to the sixth form, pupils have a narrow vocabulary and a poor knowledge of basic grammar.

146. In general, pupils' behaviour is satisfactory, but most have little enthusiasm for modern foreign languages and they have a positive aversion to speaking them. In Key Stage 4, pupils' reluctance to speak slows down lessons to the point where teachers are not able to complete the planned material.

147. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Those who teach the subject full time are well qualified, have a good knowledge of their subject and plan their lessons to lead pupils through their learning in a logical manner, although sometimes they misjudge the amount of work to be covered. There are, however, part-time teachers of French who have no qualifications and who do not teach to a satisfactory standard. The aims of the lessons and the standards to be reached are rarely shared with pupils. In general, expectations are not high enough. The main strength of the full-time teachers is the extent to which they use French or German to conduct the lesson and communicate with pupils. Teachers employ a range of methods and strategies in their lessons, and pupils have opportunities to work in pairs and small groups.

148. The curriculum for modern foreign languages has breadth and balance and is supported by a detailed scheme of work. The time allocated to the subject does not allow the teachers to cover the material in sufficient depth to ensure satisfactory progress. Little is done to provide the most able with challenging extension work, and the curriculum for pupils with special educational needs and other low attainers is insufficiently thought out.

149. Assessment is a weakness. Teachers mark work and keep records but the marking is rarely diagnostic or helpful. There are no obvious criteria for marks and they are not related to the demands of Key Stage 3, GCSE or A-level. The information provided by assessments is not used to inform planning so as to include more precise objectives for learning, concentrating on what pupils are expected to learn as well as what they are expected to do.

150. The absence of a permanent head of department has hindered review and renewal. The arrival of a new one should provide a springboard to raise the levels of attainment in modern foreign languages to those of other subjects.

History

151. Attainment is in line with national averages across all key stages. At the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is average. In 1999, teacher assessments show that 48 per cent of the year group achieved level 5 or above. This is slightly below the national average of 56 per cent although the proportion achieving the higher levels of 7 and

above was in line with the national pattern. At the end of Key Stage 4, pupils' attainment is average. In 1998, 46.5 per cent of pupils achieved GCSE grades A* to C compared with the national average of 54 per cent. However, in 1999 this had risen to 50.7 per cent, which is slightly below the national average. The trend has been steadily upwards over the last four years. Boys do not perform as well as girls in GCSE and the gap is almost twice the national figure. At the end of the sixth form, attainment is average. In 1998, no students achieved the higher grades and 77.7 per cent achieved grades A* to E. In 1999, 40 per cent achieved grades A* to B and this is considerably above the national average. All students passed the A-level examinations and this is well above the national average. In Key Stage 3, the majority of pupils are able to use resources to make judgements and to reach conclusions. Many do not have a well-developed sense of chronology and cannot place events in a time frame. They do understand the concept of past time and can construct time lines to illustrate their own lives. They have a good understanding of the place of biography in historical research and are fully immersed in writing the biography of a relative. In Key Stage 4, pupils extend their vocabulary and are able to use words such as 'scapegoat' and 'propaganda'. They make good use of their textbooks to compare information and make informed judgements about the material, rather than just reading the books for factual information. Many can comment on conditions in pre-war Germany. Students in the sixth form have good research skills and many are able to balance various opinions, as, for example, in their essays evaluating the significance of the Russo-Japanese war on Russia and the oral work being prepared on Bismarck's foreign policy.

152. Overall, progress is satisfactory. It is satisfactory in Key Stages 3 and 4, and good in the sixth form. Pupils arrive in Year 9 with a mixed experience of history. They make progress in developing their vocabulary and in understanding what history is. They learn to use evidence and extend their knowledge. Whilst many do retain some information, their long-term factual recall is rather limited. In Key Stage 4, pupils continue to make satisfactory gains in knowledge and they develop their analytical skills. In lessons, many pupils make good progress but do not always make effective use of this over longer periods. Sixth form students continue to consolidate and extend their analytical skills, learn to use sources and a wide range of evidence to support their arguments. They greatly extend their knowledge of European history.

153. The response of pupils and students is very good. Pupils in Key Stage 3 know that they are in class to learn and they arrive to lessons well equipped and ready to work. They are generally attentive and show interest in their work. The behaviour of pupils is very good and they are polite and sensible. Pupils work well together and collaborate when given the opportunity. There are many opportunities to work in pairs and small groups, and this is done effectively and without fuss. Boys and girls work well together. They do not yet show enough initiative or take enough responsibility for their own learning and in many lessons are dependent on the teacher for pace, direction and mundane instructions. However, there are opportunities throughout the year for research and individual studies and most pupils make good use of these. Sixth form students are mature and diligent and in classes there is a pleasant working atmosphere. They are helped to develop their capacity for individual study by being given appropriate tasks and good support.

154. Teaching is good and in a significant proportion of lessons is very good. This has improved since the last inspection. Teachers are knowledgeable about their subject and the requirements of the National Curriculum and examination requirements. This is especially so with sixth form work, where staff are able to guide and challenge students with clarity and rigour. Staff expectations are high and this is clearly communicated to pupils. Teachers' long-term planning is better in the GCSE course and for A-level work. The Key Stage 3 programme of studies, whilst covering the statutory requirements, is not well focused, lays too much emphasis on factual content and does not address the teaching of information and communications technology sufficiently. Lessons are well organised and many flow with a good pace and a subtle sense of humour. Insufficient attention is given to the preparation of materials for a range of abilities, although the recent purchase of new textbooks, with a foundation level, helps in this respect. Teachers make good use of praise and day-to-day assessments to support and encourage pupils and to check their learning. A variety of teaching methods is used but teachers do not insist on in-depth oral answers, especially in Year 9, or ensure that sufficient opportunities are made for pupils to express opinions, develop their arguments and question each other. Homework is well used and is integrated with class work where possible or extends the work done, for example in the biographies that Year 9 have to write over a longer period of time.

155. The curriculum is satisfactory overall but insufficient attention is given to liaison with the feeder schools and the prior learning of pupils. Starting Year 9 with a unit on 'What is history?' highlights this problem. Assessment is a strong feature of the department's work and there are very good arrangements to test, track and support individual pupils. The use of assessment for curriculum planning is not well established, although some work in Key Stage 3 is likely to result in changes to the programmes of study. The department is part of the Humanities Faculty but still operates independently in many areas. It is well led by a new and enthusiastic head of department who is ably supported by other staff. There have been many recent changes in the organisation of

the department and the writing of new schemes of work. Whilst development planning is not a strong feature, the department has established some short- and long-term goals. Overall, this is a good department that continues to improve and to show improved examination results.

Geography

156. At the end of Key Stage 3, the attainment of pupils is in line with national averages. Teacher assessments are in line with national average at level 5 and above but a smaller proportion of pupils achieves levels 6 and above.

157. At the end of Key Stage 4, attainment overall is average. The proportion of GCSE grades A* to C was slightly below average in 1999 and in the last three years had been well below the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A* to G was above national average in 1999 and has been about national average for a number of years. Low attainers are achieving better than might be expected but there is a small proportion of high achievers. Boys generally perform less well than girls and this gap is much higher than the national pattern. In 1999, the girls' results at grades A* to C were considerably higher than the national average whilst the boys' were much lower. There was a 20 per cent difference between boys and girls in 1999.

158. At the end of Year 13, the attainment of students is average. In 1999, there was a 100 per cent pass rate but the proportion of high achievers was below average. Only 25 per cent achieved grades A or B compared with a national average over 30 per cent. However, this was the best result for a number of years. The trend has been for results at grades A and B and A to E to be well below the national average.

159. In Key Stage 3, pupils know about the weather patterns in the British Isles and carry out wide-ranging studies of European countries. These studies are sometimes lacking in clear aim and focus. They have a good knowledge of place location and many know a considerable number of the features on the National Curriculum maps. Their knowledge and understanding of Ordnance Survey maps is not secure and many cannot explain the use of contour lines. A significant number struggle with six-figure grid references and cannot explain terms such as 'embankment', 'cutting' or 'coniferous woodland'. In Key Stage 4, the majority of pupils have an understanding of population dynamics but not all are confident with the concept of 'rates' as in birth and death rates. Most pupils can carry out field investigations with teacher guidance and support. For example, the GCSE course work on traffic problems in Newcastle show that many pupils can collect data, analyse it and present their results and conclusions in clear reports. Many make excellent use of information and communications technology to present their work. A minority finds this work difficult because of the need for a sustained effort and a high degree of personal effort and commitment. A significant minority has a poorly developed background and is unable to explain terms that appear in their own work, such as 'intensive' and 'subsistence'. Sixth form students can organise their thoughts in a geographical way and handle a variety of data to produce good geographical reports, for example, in a lesson on earthquakes.

160. Progress is satisfactory in both key stages and in the sixth form. In Key Stage 3, pupils make good progress in many lessons but do not always retain their learning over longer periods. Where there are non-specialist teachers, progress is more limited because of the teachers' lack of subject expertise. With specialist geography teachers, the majority of pupils make good progress by extending their knowledge, practising skills of map work and developing their use of specialist terms. In Key Stage 4, progress is made in the understanding of new concepts and the use of models to apply geographical ideas. They learn how to deal with geographical enquiries and apply this in practical situations. Some consolidation takes place that helps to ensure more thorough learning. In the sixth form, progress is made in analysing information, using evidence and the consideration of case studies to examine theories.

161. Pupils respond very well. In Key Stage 3, they have good attitudes to their work, arriving promptly and ready to work from the outset. In Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, their attitudes are very good. They show interest in the work and are attentive with very good levels of concentration and in the sixth form a degree of enthusiasm. Behaviour is very good. Pupils are sensible and polite. Sixth formers are mature and reliable. They develop very good relationships and are supportive and respectful to each other and to staff. This all leads to a pleasant working environment where pupils can learn with challenge and enjoyment. There is little evidence of pupils taking sufficient responsibility for their own learning and even in the sixth form there is a tendency to let the teacher perform rather than be actively involved. There are opportunities throughout all years for some individual research and this increases in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.

162. Teaching is good. In a small proportion of lessons it is very good and in just under half it is satisfactory.

Teaching is generally good when there is a specialist geography teacher. It is satisfactory when there are non-specialists, although the pattern is not consistent. Teachers' knowledge is generally satisfactory; in Key Stage 4 it is very good and in the sixth form it is excellent. Many non-specialist teachers in Key Stage 3 lack detailed subject knowledge and expertise and in these situations pupils are not making as much progress as they should. All teachers have high expectations of their pupils and insist on good presentation. There is thorough planning of courses, with detailed schemes of work. However, individual teachers are left to plan too much on their own, an inefficient and ineffective use of their time. A lack of collaboration leads to different Year 9 classes having different experiences. Teachers use a variety of methods, including good use of video, newspapers, magazines and Ordnance Survey maps. In too many cases, there is too much teacher talk and insufficient pupil and student activity. Teachers tend to teach the whole class and insufficient attention is given to different materials and routes through materials for pupils of varying abilities. The management of all classes is very good and discipline is not an issue. There are good resources, many produced in school and they are used effectively. In most cases, lessons start and finish on time. Teachers praise pupils and encourage them and make sensitive day-to-day assessments, but they do not always challenge pupils enough to substantiate their answers in oral work.

163. The curriculum is satisfactory overall but there are weaknesses in the effective liaison with middle schools, shown by the need to start Year 9 with a local study to develop basic map skills. The limited amount of time in Key Stage 3 restricts the amount of fieldwork and there is no adequate tracking of skills across the whole key stage. The entitlement to planned use of information and communications technology for all pupils is not strong. Assessment is a particular strength of the department, with very good use of National Curriculum levels in Key Stage 3 and very good procedures in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. The assignment sheets are excellent, with clear guidance and target setting. The use of assessments has rightly been concentrated on monitoring individual performance and less on its use to inform curriculum planning. However, in the sixth form, the survey sheets to ascertain student views and opinions of each module are effective.

164. The department is well organised by a very competent geographer. The fact that he also has a large workload as deputy head is not satisfactory. The arrangements for the whole of Year 9 to be taught by non-geographers poses an extra demand in terms of support and monitoring.

170.

Art

165. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is slightly above national expectations. Pupils are cutting and folding paper to produce good quality graphic work, and they soon master difficult concepts and clearly enjoy their work. Their knowledge of colour theory is also impressive. GCSE results in art at the end of Key Stage 4 are well below national average, and are little improved since the previous inspection. Only 28.6 per cent of pupils gained grades between A* and C compared to the national average of around 60 per cent. However, these results do not reflect the attainment of the pupils seen during inspection week. Recent changes to the leadership and staffing of the department have already brought significant improvements. The attainment of the pupils currently at Key Stage 4 is now approaching expectations, with the girls doing slightly better than the boys. Pupils are producing challenging and interesting work based on distorted images seen through reflective surfaces, musical instruments and the work of the Dutch artist, Escher. They are knowledgeable and enthusiastic and contribute constructively in lessons. In 1999 three candidates sat the A-level examination. One gained a grade C pass, another grade D, while the third failed to reach the required standard. These results are below national expectations. Sixth formers currently working in the department are attaining at similar levels. Interesting experimental work, inspired by the sculptor Alberto Giacometti, is being produced from still-life groups, using a variety of basic materials and processes. Under-developed drawing skills are holding standards below the expected level at each key stage. Many pupils prefer to copy rather than make their own observational drawings. Nevertheless, the variety of work displayed in corridors and the public areas of the school is evidence of the creative atmosphere generated in the art department and gives an insight into the mix of traditional and modern methods used there.

166. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 3 and overcome the considerable basic skills deficit with which they enter the school. However, in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form they have not yet had sufficient continuity in acquiring higher technical and interpretive skills to make satisfactory progress and attain in line with national averages, nor is the curriculum sufficiently extensive to allow progress in all aspects of the subject. Current leadership in art is strong and changes to rectify these deficiencies are being made.

167. Pupils' response is satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good amongst those who opt to continue their studies into Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Throughout the age-range, pupils derive enjoyment from their work and are happy working independently or in groups. As they grow older, they quickly learn the value of independent study. They are proud of their work and respect the work of their fellows. Relationships between staff and pupils

are a strength and pupils are quick to ask for help in improving their work. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils, whose behaviour is usually very good.

168. Teaching is good and in sixth form lessons it is very good. The staff build positive relationships with their pupils while maintaining a professional atmosphere. They are knowledgeable and employ a range of strategies to engage their pupils in interesting work. The teachers' movement around their classes, their skills of encouragement, of assessing progress and modifying tasks to redirect efforts, are all positive aids to learning. It is normal for teachers to bring their own drawings into school to suggest ways forward or generate enthusiasm. They explain tasks clearly and set appropriate targets for pupils who experience difficulties. Support for pupils with special educational needs is useful and worthwhile and these pupils do particularly well. At the same time, more able pupils are insufficiently extended. Homework is appropriate and carefully chosen. Much of the good practice in the department is not formally observed by senior managers as procedures for monitoring teaching are not sufficiently comprehensive.

169. The curriculum in art is unsatisfactory. It is neither broad nor balanced. Long-standing problems of staffing and resourcing have prevented progress since the previous inspection. The delivery of information and communications technology has improved recently but inadequate funding of capitation has limited the opportunities to work with three-dimensional materials or textiles. The time allowed for GCSE art is slightly less than in most schools. Systems for the assessment of pupils' work are good and the results are used to aid planning.

170. Pupils are introduced to elements of European and non-European cultures which helps them in their own work and encourages tolerance and respect. The obvious trust they have for their teachers promotes personal development and raises standards. Good, sensitive leadership provides clear direction. Since the last inspection, the department's records have been updated and more closely consider the implications of time and finance, but are still not sufficiently detailed. The accommodation is adequate but would not allow for curriculum expansion. There is a very positive ethos and a welcoming atmosphere. The improvements made by the department require further investment in resources if they are to be sustained.

Business studies

171. At the end of Year 11 in 1999, 56 per cent of pupils attained grades A* to C, above the national and school average, although the number achieving the top grades of A* or A was low, reflecting slightly weaker performance in the written examination. Whilst 70 per cent of boys attained grades A* to C, only 43 per cent of girls did so; 14 boys were not entered for the examination. Ninety-eight per cent of all pupils achieved grades A* to G. Results show a steady rise from previous years, and an improvement from the 1998 figure, which was slightly below the national average. In addition to business studies, nine pupils took an additional GCSE in information studies, with a pass rate at A* to C of 100 per cent. In lessons seen, Year 10 pupils of all abilities could satisfactorily explain industry sectors and the meaning of limited liability. In a very well-structured Year 11 lesson, pupils were able to use information and communications technology effectively to construct a spreadsheet to calculate the pay of a bus driver using complicated formulae. Inspection of coursework assignments shows a very high standard of presentation overall, with good use of information and communications technology to draw graphs to analyse firms' break-even points, and extended descriptions of marketing and sales promotion strategies used by companies. Evaluations of surveys were generally satisfactory but sometimes lacked analytical depth.

172. Progress in lessons seen was invariably good as a result of well-planned lessons that consolidated pupils' prior knowledge and built on their key skills of communication, information and communications technology and application of number. Pupils are constantly made aware of targets set for them to improve. They concentrate closely on their tasks, behave well and cooperate effectively in groups.

173. Teaching is good and frequently very good, based on good planning and an appropriate variety of teaching methods that meet the needs of pupils of all abilities and engage their interest. Case studies are topical and challenging, and homework is used well to extend pupils' research skills.

174. GCSE courses in business studies are popular and well staffed by experienced teachers. The courses have a high profile within the school. Course teams are committed, and meet regularly to evaluate pupils' progress. Text books, computer software and the Internet are well-used, and teachers make particularly good use of local industry and pupils' own contacts to enrich learning. The access to and use of information and communications

technology and local industry has improved considerably since the last inspection.

Music

175. Standards of attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 are broadly in line with national expectations. Work undertaken on a music project about space indicated well-developed listening skills and sensitivity to how music can be used to convey feelings. Pupils had some understanding of how composers used musical structures to convey feelings and could devise simple compositions of their own. Pupils lacked confidence in their use of musical terminology when discussing dynamics and rhythm. The majority of pupils can perform their ideas on the electronic keyboard.

176. At Key Stage 4, results at GCSE are below the national average but standards in lessons are in line with national averages. In performance work, pupils cover a wide spectrum, ranging from skill on several instruments at around Grade V level, to relative beginners on a single instrument. In composition, the majority of pupils can produce competent scores of their ideas, but these are generally restricted to rather simple diatonic pieces based on classical forms such as minuet, variations and strophic songs. Analytical work on modern songs is thoughtful and well produced using information and communications technology. However, this work rarely provides a creative stimulus for their compositions. Some project work is too reliant on regurgitated material and excessive artwork.

177. At A-level, a judgement on standards against the national average cannot be made owing to the very small numbers taking the subject over the past few years. Standards of attainment in the work scrutinised are broadly average. Students produce imaginative recital programmes on a range of instruments. Composition work is meticulously produced in both hand written and information and communications technology format. Compositions are generally diatonic and based on classical models but with some good examples of extended forms for a range of instruments. A dissertation on the music of Bach and Handel indicated limited research skills.

178. The majority of pupils make satisfactory progress at all stages. The few pupils with instrumental proficiency gained outside the curriculum usually make quicker progress with both composition and performance work. Some low-attaining pupils make slow progress in completing written compositions.

179. Pupils' responses are good throughout the school. They work in a disciplined, well-motivated and responsible manner. In composition tasks they work effectively on their own initiative. They take pride in neatly produced written and manuscript work. Instruments and equipment are carefully handled.

180. Teaching is satisfactory overall. Pupils benefit from a well-disciplined, supportive and friendly teaching style set in a well-ordered classroom. Lesson tasks are clearly explained and supported by effective handouts and meticulous blackboard work. In some lessons, pupils' attainment is restricted by insufficient challenge through excessive teacher explanation and ineffectual use of questioning. At Key Stage 3, the weekly lessons lack a range of practical and academic activities. Throughout the school, the curriculum takes little account of the wealth of twentieth century and world music available. Pupils do not have sufficient criteria and targets to enable them to improve their performances and compositions.

181. Pupils' musical education is enhanced by a good range of extra-curricular work, including a well supported band, choir and annual musical production.

Physical education

182. At the end of Key Stage 3, standards are generally below that expected in most activities mainly because of the low level of skill and experiences pupils bring with them on entry into the school. Some pupils are still unable to swim and in gymnastics they lack experience in sequence work, body control and coordination. Most are unable to play a game to the required level, understanding tactics and strategies. By the end of Key Stage 4, standards are in line with expectations in basketball and above them in volleyball. Standards are below expectations in swimming and netball and in GCSE practical work with Year 11 pupils. The standards achieved at GCSE are well below the national expectation and have been so over the past two years. Only one candidate sat the examination in 1998 and none in 1999. However the subject has now become established within the curriculum, and standards in A-level lessons observed during the inspection are in line with national averages

and above them in physiology.

183. Progress in the majority of lessons is at least satisfactory but was good in half the lessons seen. Very good progress was seen in a basketball lesson, where pupils in Year 10 were able to bring previous learning into a game, with sound knowledge of the rules and of how to referee. Very good progress was also seen in volleyball, where pupils in Year 10 demonstrated good control of the ball. Progress was unsatisfactory in a Year 10 GCSE practical lesson, where pupils' attitudes to the subject were poor. Progress in the A-level course is satisfactory in biomechanics and good in physiology.

184. The attitudes of pupils to physical education are very good. They are keen to learn and are well motivated. Attitudes are particularly positive in Year 10. Pupils listen intently to instructions, are articulate and prepared to be involved in discussion. They concentrate on tasks set, work collaboratively with a partner and in groups and behaviour is always very good. Relationships between pupils and their teachers are very good. Pupils in Year 10 demonstrate a mature attitude to their GCSE work.

185. The quality of teaching is at least satisfactory at all key stages, with three quarters of the teaching good and a quarter being good or very good. It is best at Key Stage 4. Teachers have good subject knowledge and expectations of most pupils are high. Lesson planning is often thorough and teaching strategies are wide. In a lesson with Year 10 pupils in volleyball, excellent teaching was enhanced by good group work, using a range of progressive practice to ensure that pupils understood the block and the smash. This new learning was placed successfully into a game. In a swimming lesson, pupils in Year 9 were able to analyse the components of the backstroke effectively to improve the efficiency of their legs during propulsion. Relationships between teachers and their pupils are very good and a strength of the department. Pupils enjoy working with their teachers. Some teaching at A-level lacks challenge. Not all teachers are sufficiently familiar with the requirements of the National Curriculum or aware of the full range of ability of pupils in classes. Lesson planning does not always consider the varied needs of pupils, but where tasks are open-ended, pupils with special educational needs make good progress.

186. The curriculum is generally broad and balanced, but no dance is offered to boys at Key Stage 3. The option system at Key Stage 4 has shortcomings in that some groups are too small to constitute an efficient use of staffing, and pupils' attitudes in Year 11 are less than positive. Some units of work are taught for six weeks but this is too short for the necessary progress to be made. Timetable anomalies result in two year groups using small changing facilities and some accommodation is not used for a large proportion of the week. A swimming group in Year 9 is too large and breaks health and safety recommendations of one teacher to 20 pupils. Assessment procedures are good but reports to parents do not give enough information of what pupils know, understand and can do. A range of extra-curricular activities is on offer to pupils and school teams are successful. There are in excess of 200 pupils engaged in competitive team games, with the support of eight staff. A number of pupils have achieved success at area and county level in a range of sports, most notably in soccer, athletics and swimming.

187. The department is well led by an enthusiastic head of department who has made an impact on the raising of standards over the one year of his appointment. He offers positive support to an enthusiastic newly qualified teacher who is already committed to the school. Standards set by the staff are high and there is now a commitment to raising standards particularly at examination level.

Religious education

188. This is an improving department, which has effectively addressed most of the issues of the previous inspection report. Improvements to the quality of teaching and to the programme of work have resulted in significantly higher levels of pupil attainment and progress.

189. By the ages of 14 and 16, the attainment of the majority of pupils is now in line with the expectations of the Locally Agreed Syllabus. Pupils have an appropriate knowledge and understanding for their age of the richness and diversity of religion, of the place of Christianity and other principal religions in the country, of the distinctive features of those religions, and of religious language, concepts and symbols. Their skills in making a personal response to religious questions are particularly well developed.

190. The school has introduced a GCSE course, and an A-level course since the previous inspection, and the first pupils to sit the examinations will do so at the end of this academic year. The attainment of candidates in their

final year in the school is in line with expectations for their ages. The school does not, however, make provision for sixth form pupils other than A-level students to study the subject, and is in breach of its statutory requirements to do so.

191. In Key Stage 3, the majority of pupils pursuing the Agreed Syllabus make satisfactory, and in many instances, good progress in their work. At the start of their first year in the school, they are able to tackle work demanding relatively simple responses to some basic religious questions. By its conclusion, they have moved on to work demanding the application of higher-order skills, in, for example, evaluating the evidence for the existence of the historical Jesus, or handling abstract concepts, such as those relating to the resurrection, or the nature of the Holy Spirit.

192. Work becomes increasingly challenging over the next two years, and by the end of Key Stage 4 pupils can, for example, apply religious insights to moral issues relating to marriage or wealth and poverty, or grasp highly abstract concepts in Buddhism. The majority of pupils pursuing GCSE and A-level courses make good progress, as was well evidenced in a Year 11 revision lesson on the importance of the mosque in Islam.

193. The large majority of pupils respond well to the subject. They come to lessons keen to learn, are interested in their work, and take pride in it. Most are attentive, listen well, and sustain concentration. They are keen to ask and answer questions, and listen with respect to each others' views and opinions. The great majority of pupils behave very well in lessons, and enjoy very good relationships with their peers. The good response and behaviour of pupils is a reflection of good teaching in the subject, which is underpinned by the very good relationships which teachers enjoy with pupils. They respect and value them as individuals, while at the same time having high expectations of them, and demanding and receiving an equal respect in turn.

194. Pupils are provided with good opportunities for developing the skills of collaborative working, in pairs and small groups, as for example, in a Year 9 lesson, where they explored questions of ultimate purpose and meaning, and ideas about God. They are also given good opportunities for developing skills of independent research and enquiry, as in the innovatory Year 9 'Alpha' project on Christianity, and project on Sikhism. The low level of provision of textbooks, however, inhibits the exploitation of such opportunities to the full.

195. The quality of teaching was at least satisfactory, and in the very great majority of lessons observed, good. Where teaching is strongest, teachers have a very good command of their subject. They know clearly what they wish their pupils to learn, and plan their lessons effectively to achieve their aims. Teachers engage and hold their pupils' interest through a variety of interesting and challenging activities and tasks, whether it be, for example, group preparation in Year 9 of 'interview' questions on key issues they would wish to challenge God with, or exploring in Year 10 the work of the Samaritans, with visitors from the organisation. Teachers structure their lessons well, and maintain a brisk pace. They strike a good balance between whole-class, paired, group and individual work, and between written and oral work. They regularly set homework which extends the work done in class, and mark pupils' work conscientiously and supportively. In instances where teaching is less strong, it is characterised by a less secure knowledge of the subject and a consequent over-reliance on specialist support with planning and resources.

196. The head of department exercises very effective leadership and management, and has a clear vision of the direction the subject should take. Extensive developmental work has been undertaken, aimed at raising the quality of schemes of work and teaching, which is in a large measure responsible for the improvements in attainment, progress and response of pupils since the previous inspection. Very good support is provided to the high number of non-specialist teachers in the department.

197. If standards of attainment are to be raised further, the school should make provision for all sixth form students to pursue the subject, ensure that non-specialist teachers have access to appropriate training in the subject, and improve the provision of learning resources, especially of textbooks.

The sixth form

198. Students are able to choose from a wide variety of options at both A-level and GNVQ. In addition to the core A-level subjects of English, mathematics, sciences, geography, history and art, courses are offered in business studies, economics, media studies and general studies. There are well-established GNVQ courses at intermediate level (taken over one year) in business, health and social care and engineering. A newly introduced course in leisure and tourism is proving popular. At advanced level there are popular GNVQ courses in business and in

health and social care which attract students both from the intermediate courses and GCSE in Year 11. The GNVQ courses provide an increasingly popular pathway from GCSE through to further and higher education and employment.

199. Attainment in 1999 for A-level economics is 100 per cent of students at grades A and B, an outstanding result which is well above the national average and a rise of more than four times the 1998 figure. Five students were boys, with one girl. In A-level business studies, 100 per cent of students obtained grades A to E.

200. The completion rate for the GNVQ advanced business course in 1999 is 25 per cent. Although this is below the national average, the two students who passed obtained merit and distinction grades, and the remainder of those students originally registered are expected to complete their studies shortly. For advanced health and social care, completion is just below the national average expectation. Two advanced students received distinction grades. In the advanced health and social care course, a third of the students completed in summer 1999, below national expectations, and similar to the previous year. Results reflect lower attainment on entry.

201. By the age of 17, students on the intermediate GNVQ business course completed their studies in line with the national average, showing a rising trend since 1996. A third of the students achieved distinction grades. On the intermediate health and social care course, two of the three students completed in summer 1999, compared with a lower rate in 1996. In the engineering course, now well established, three-quarters completed, in line with national expectations. A record number of sixth form students entered the national examination for Young Enterprise, equivalent to two GCSEs at grades A* to C, and of the 19 students, a quarter obtained a distinction grade, and another quarter a merit grade. The other students passed. In lessons seen, Year 13 students on the A-level economics course demonstrated a clear understanding of the opportunities and threats afforded by European union. Students on the A-level business course can calculate depreciation by drawing graphs using the fixed-line method. In an excellent health and social care lesson at advanced level, students showed a mature ability to grade each others' coursework assignments. Intermediate leisure and tourism students can use information and communications technology effectively to design brochures of local tourist attractions, and engineering students can make a hardened scriber with appropriate tools. Students on the A level media studies course can record television adverts to illustrate a project on women's life-styles.

202. The coursework portfolios of intermediate business students show well-presented work including computer-generated business documents and well-drawn graphs. One student obtained a furniture catalogue from a local company to design an office for disabled people and made a presentation to the rest of the class. Although much of the coursework is of good quality, and reflects considerable achievement in the key skills of communication, number and information and communications technology, students' planning and evaluation is often less than satisfactory.

203. Progress of students in over half of lessons seen in a variety of A-level and GNVQ lessons was good, and never less than satisfactory. In a third of lessons seen, students made very good or excellent progress. A-level business students are beginning to develop a good grasp of financial concepts for completing balance sheets. Economics students make good progress in analysing reasons for changes in demand curves, whilst students on GNVQ courses improve their key skills through a variety of team assignments, some involving visits to local businesses such as football clubs and health centres. They research topics well using local business links and the Internet. Comparatively few students used short-term work placements or part-time jobs to obtain data for their assignments.

204. Students behave well, invariably show considerable interest in their studies, and cooperate well with each other and teachers. The majority of students are well motivated, enthusiastic and mature in their attitudes towards learning in class. The majority of students respond particularly well to working in pairs and groups. A minority do not use private study time efficiently.

205. Teaching was good or better in over three-quarters of lessons seen in economics, business studies, media at A-level and a variety of GNVQ lessons at both levels. Lessons are well planned and consist of relevant, practical activities in which students can readily become involved. Teachers manage students well, particularly where lessons include group tasks with short deadlines for completion, and in economics teachers use a greater variation of methods than in the last inspection. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and use topical case studies and newspaper extracts to enliven research topics. Although deadlines for assignments are realistic, the addition of more short tasks involving key skills would increase completion rates in some subjects.

206.The sixth form has a strong vocational flavour, and vocational and business and economics courses are staffed by experienced teachers with experience of industry. Most classes, apart from an A-level economics class, are large enough to be deemed viable. Where Year 12 and 13 classes for GNVQ subjects are combined, students' learning is enriched rather than adversely affected.

207.Students on GNVQ courses are assessed regularly on a unit basis, and assessment procedures are rigorous, being regularly monitored by both internal examiners and the awarding body. In addition to their coursework being assessed, GNVQ students have to take external multiple-choice tests at the end of most units. These are set nationally and help provide an agreed standard. GNVQ students' key skills of communication, number and information and communications technology also are assessed with the help of the specialist teachers.

208.The assessment of sixth form students' attainment and progress has recently become more sharply focused through the development of a clear tracking system involving tutors and students working together to set and monitor achievable targets, which are linked to a predicted grade. Subject staff can clearly indicate causes of concern to form tutors. Students do not currently carry out sufficient self-assessment and tracking of their own key skills progress.

209.GNVQ courses are well monitored internally and regularly checked by visitors from the examining board. Course teams are well managed in all subject areas and effectively coordinated. Teams always seek to improve in line with the school's development plans. Teachers use a wide variety of resources, with good use of local business and industry. The school has ensured that students have increasingly good access to computers, and textbook resources in subject bases are satisfactory. The school is well placed to develop further business and vocational courses in line with forthcoming National Curriculum changes.

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

210. This report bases its judgements on the work of 14 inspectors spending a total of 48 inspector days in school. Extensive analysis was made before during and after the inspection of policy documents, schemes of work and other relevant statements. Parental views were sought and recorded via the standard questionnaire and parents’ meeting. One hundred and eighteen hours were spent on lesson observation, sampling all year groups, subjects and ability sets. Interviews took place with governors, the Headteacher and all teachers with a significant management role as well as with non-teaching staff and representatives of the wider community. The work of a sample of pupils across all subjects was formally scrutinised by inspectors, together with that of other pupils seen in lessons. Discussions were held with pupils. A total of 23 hours were spent on further observations, interviews and the formal scrutiny of work.

216. **DATA AND INDICATORS**

216. **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
Y9 – Y13	694	17	68	54

216. **Teachers and classes**

216. **Qualified teachers (Y9 –Y13)**

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent):	40.3
Number of pupils per qualified teacher:	17.2

216. **Education support staff (Y9 – Y13)**

Total number of education support staff:	4
Total aggregate hours worked each week:	114

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	80
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Average teaching group size:	KS3	27
	KS4	24

Financial data

Financial year:	1998-99
	£
Total Income	2,040,629
Total Expenditure	2,421,792
Expenditure per pupil	3,957
Balance brought forward from previous year	370,442
Balance carried forward to next year	-10,721

216. **PARENTAL SURVEY**

Number of questionnaires sent out: 694
 Number of questionnaires returned: 63

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	24	51	19	3	3
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	32	63	0	2	3
The school handles complaints from parents well	20	46	27	5	2
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	16	60	15	8	2
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	22	59	11	3	5
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	30	56	13	0	2
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	22	59	11	6	2
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	25	48	13	11	3
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	29	50	19	2	2
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	24	56	18	2	2
My child(ren) like(s) school	26	57	13	2	3