

INSPECTION REPORT

Droitwich Spa High School

Briar Mill, Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire, WR9 0AA

LEA area: Worcestershire

Unique Reference Number: 116931

Headteacher: Mr A E Cledwyn-Davies

Reporting inspector: David Potter
T11261

Dates of inspection: 15/11/99 to 19/11/99

School Inspection No. 184324

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
Type of control:	County
Age range of pupils:	12 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	Worcestershire County Council
Name of chair of governors:	Mr K Rogers
Date of previous inspection:	13 th – 17 th February 1995

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Saleem Hussain, Lay Inspector		Attendance; Partnership with parents and the community
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Graham Powell	English	
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Jan Greenhalgh	Design and technology	
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Hazel Saunders	Geography	
Peter Kendall	Art	
John Forster	Music	
Ann Braithwaite	Physical education	Staffing, accommodation and learning resources; The efficiency of the school
Joyce Mackley	Religious education	
Brian Bartlett		Special educational needs; Curriculum and assessment; Key Stage 4
Sheila Brown		Equal opportunities; Attitudes, behaviour and personal development; Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

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MAIN FINDINGS

What the school does well

Pupils' standards of achievement and the progress they make:

Examination results at A level and GNVQ are excellent.

GCSE results have improved recently and are above the national average in the proportion of higher grades.

The quality provided by the school:

Teaching is of high quality in the sixth form.

Provision for pupils' social development is very good; the school is remarkable for the way it encourages pupils to take responsibility for their learning.

The support and welfare provided for pupils are good, with many very good features.

Links with the community enrich the life and work of the school very well.

The school's ethos

The school has a strong sense of community which values individuals.

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good, and pupils of all abilities respond well in lessons.

Pupils make a strong contribution to the school, displaying a high standard of leadership and responsibility.

Relationships across the school are very good.

Management and efficiency:

The headteacher and senior management team (SMT) provide very good leadership and have established very good planning systems which form a secure basis for school improvement.

Financial control and school administration are very good.

Where the school has weaknesses

Pupils' standards of achievement and the progress they make:

Many pupils of middle and lower ability under-achieve at GCSE.

The quality provided by the school

There are weaknesses in the teaching of middle to lower ability pupils in Key Stage 4.

There are weaknesses in the teaching of mathematics in Key Stages 3 and 4, and science in Key Stage 4.

Provision for information technology (IT) is inadequate.

Management and efficiency

The quality of departmental leadership is too variable from one subject to another to ensure that improvement is rapid; leadership is poor in modern languages and unsatisfactory in science.

The use of evaluation and assessment data is inconsistent across departments.

The school's strengths outweigh its 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 and guardians of the pupils at the school.

How the school has improved since the last inspection

The school has made sound improvement since the inspection of 1995, and rapid progress in the last two years since the appointment of the current headteacher and the constitution of a new SMT: sound to good teaching quality has been maintained; test and examination results have risen in line with national averages. Recent GCSE results have shown more rapid improvement, and the very good A level results have been still further improved.

Of the weaknesses identified in the last inspection, good progress has been made with: the National Curriculum in physical education (PE), which now fully meets requirements; the library, which is centrally sited and more attractive to users; the provision for religious education (RE) in Key Stage 4; raising the staff's awareness of special needs issues; the performance of boys in tests and examinations; curricular links with middle schools; the organisation of the curriculum and timetable.

Progress has been made with: developing an appropriate curriculum for pupils of lower ability; matching teaching to the needs of the pupils (differentiation); the development of policies for monitoring and evaluation; - but there is more to be done in these areas.

Provision for IT is weak, as it was in 1995, and fails to meet statutory requirements. The school still does not comply with the requirement to provide collective worship and to teach RE in the sixth form.

Governors and the SMT are committed to the improvement of quality and the raising of standards. They have put into place systems of monitoring and support which have begun to bring about improvement, but which are as yet inconsistently implemented from one department to another. The school is well placed to improve further.

Standards in subjects

Performance in:	Compared with all schools	Compared with similar schools	Key
Key Stage 3 test			
English	C	C	
Mathematics	C	C	
Science	C	D	
All core subjects	C	C	
GCSE Examinations			
5 or more grades A* - C	C	C	
5 or more grades A* - G	D	E	
1 or more grades A* - G	D	E	
GCSE points score	C	D	
GCE A/AS – level examination			
Average points score of those taking 2 or more A levels	A*	Not applicable	

In the left-hand column of the table, Droitwich Spa's results are compared with those of all secondary schools in England, while on the right they are compared with those of schools with pupils from similar backgrounds. In the Key Stage 3 tests, the school's results are in line with the national average in all subjects, and are in line with the average of similar schools in English and mathematics, but below it in science. At GCSE, the proportion achieving five or more of the higher grades (A* - C) matches the national average, but there is underachievement in the middle to lower grades at GCSE, where results are below the national average, and well below those of like schools. The excellent A level results are very high in relation to the national average.

Quality of teaching

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 8-9	Sound to good	English, PE, specialist SEN	Mathematics
Years 10-11	Sound	English, PE, history	Mathematics, Science
Sixth Form	Good	Teaching is of high quality across the sixth form	
English	Good		
Mathematics	Very variable, with a lot which is good and very good, but also a high proportion which is unsatisfactory		

Ninety per cent of the teaching at the school is satisfactory or better and just under half is good to excellent. There is a negligible proportion of poor teaching.

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

Other aspects of the school

Aspect	Comment
Behaviour	Behaviour is very good around the school and good in lessons. Bullying, when it occurs, is dealt with quickly and well.
Attendance	Attendance is sound overall, but low in lower ability sets in Key Stage 4. The amount of unauthorised absence is small. Pupil's punctuality is good.
Ethos*	Relationships are very good, and pupils of all abilities respond well in lessons. Pupils' personal development is very good.
Leadership and management	A very well-led and managed school with excellent organisation. Leadership at head of department level is too variable, with weak leadership in some departments.
Curriculum	The curriculum in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form is broad and balanced, while that in Key Stage 4 has weaknesses, such as the failure to provide IT.
Pupils with special educational needs (SEN)	The progress made by pupils with SEN is good in Key Stage 3 and satisfactory in Key Stage 4.
Spiritual, moral, social & cultural development	Provision for pupils' social development is very good and that for their moral development is good; provision for their spiritual and cultural development is satisfactory.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	There are good numbers of experienced and well-qualified teaching and non-teaching staff. The quality and deployment of staff, accommodation and resources support pupils' learning well.
Efficiency	Good overall, with very good administration and financial control.
Value for money	The school provides satisfactory value for money.

**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

- the quality of education the school provides and the attitudes which the school seeks to develop;
- the standards their children are achieving and the progress they are making;
- particular strengths are reported in the care and support given to individuals, including those with difficulties;
- the way the school encourages attendance, punctuality and behaviour;
- firm discipline, including the school's honest approach to bullying, and the rapid response on the occasions when it does happen.

What some parents are not happy about

- provision for IT;
- the timing of parents' evenings and reports in the
- inconsistency in the speed and helpfulness of the
ers of staff.

Inspectors agree with parents' generally positive views of the school. They agree that the school provides a good quality education, and that the care given to individuals, including those with SEN, is of a high standard. The impact of the firm discipline is an orderly community whose members can go about the business of teaching and learning.

Inspectors also agree that provision for IT is inadequate. Although the school has improved the pattern of reporting to parents, inspectors believe that further improvements could be made to the timing of parents' evenings, some of which are late in the year.

There was no evidence during the inspection to suggest that the school responds inconsistently. Links with parents are generally good.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

1. Raise the achievement of pupils of middle to lower ability, especially in Key Stage 4, by improving:
the quality of the teaching they receive in some subjects; (paragraphs 38 – 40; 119; 126)
their attendance (paragraph 35).
2. Raise the effectiveness of all heads of departments to that of the best by improving the way

they
evaluate and improve the work of their departments (paragraphs 84 - 86). Improve the
quality of leadership in modern foreign languages (paragraph 162) and science (paragraph
127).

3. Remedy the significant deficiencies in information and communication technology(ICT) by:
improving the quantity and quality of computers available for pupils' use (paragraph 95, 141);
implementing a coherent and widespread programme of staff training (paragraph 141);
ensuring that pupils in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form have opportunities to develop a breadth
of ICT skills, and to use them across the curriculum (paragraph 138 - 142).

Governors should also attend to the health and safety issues in the science laboratories (paragraph 128).

Items *in italics* were key issues at the time of the last OFSTED inspection in 1995.

Items underlined have been recognised as priorities by the school, and feature on the current school development plan.

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the school

1. Droitwich Spa High School is a large comprehensive school serving the market town of Droitwich Spa and adjacent estates and villages. The school has 1419 pupils aged 12 to 18, with slightly more boys than girls. Each year group in the main school has around 300 pupils, and there is a sixth form of 230. Both the main school and the sixth form are growing steadily, and the school is fully subscribed. Plans for building development in the area mean that the school will grow to 1500 over the next three to five years.

2. The results achieved by the intake in the national tests at age 11, taken in the middle schools a year before they join the high school, and in tests of their ability at the point of transfer, confirm that the school takes in pupils of all abilities, with an average very close to the national average. The proportion of pupils with special needs, including those with a statement, is close to the national average for comprehensive schools.

3. The school serves an area which contains pockets of considerable social deprivation but which is mostly socio-economically advantaged. The proportion of pupils for whom English is an additional language is very low.

4. The school has a comprehensive development plan (SDP), supported by a number of detailed improvement plans which show how the strategic vision will be implemented in different parts of the school. The two “headline” aims in the SDP are to improve teaching and learning as the main means of raising standards in tests and examinations; and to ensure the all-round development of each pupil. Current priorities to achieve these aims are:

to use monitoring, evaluation and training to improve teaching and learning;

to create a better curriculum for all;

to develop better systems of assessment of pupils’ work, to help them understand what they must do to improve, and to help teachers plan the curriculum and how it will be taught;

to develop resources, especially information and communications technology (ICT), to support teaching and learning.

5. Key Indicators

Attainment at Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	138	148	286

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at	Boys	77	82	71
	Girls	114	104	93
	Total	191	186	164
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	67	62	57
	National	65	60	56
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	33	41	28
	National	35	36	27

Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at	Boys	74	78	64
	Girls	113	88	73
	Total	187	166	137
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	65	57	48
	National	61	64	61
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	30	36	32
	National	30	37	30

Attainment at Key Stage 4

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	134	136	270

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	Boys	55	115	121
	Girls	74	129	129
	Total	129	244	250
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	48	90	93
	National	48	88	94

Attainment in the Sixth Form

Number of pupils aged 16, 17 and 18 who were entered for GCE A/AS examinations in the latest reporting year:	Year	Male	Female	Total
	1999	61	51	112

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	21.9	26.0	23.7	0.5	1.3	1.0
National	-	-	17.6	-	-	2.8

Number in final year of approved vocational qualifications and percentage of such pupils who achieved these qualifications		Number	% Success rate
	School	46	85
	National		79

Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions)			%
missed through absence for the latest	Authorised	School	9.1
		National comparative data	7.9
	Unauthorised	School	0.9
		National comparative data	1.1

Exclusions

Number of exclusions of pupils (of statutory school age) during the previous year:		Number
	Fixed period	91
	Permanent	6

Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:		%
	Very good or better	13
	Satisfactory or better	89
	Less than satisfactory	11

PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

Attainment and progress

6. The ability and attainment of pupils on entry to the high school are average. They achieve results in the national tests at age eleven (taken a year before they join the high school), and in the verbal and non-verbal reasoning tests taken at the point of transfer, which are very close to the national average. The distribution of ability of the intake is also “normal” - a full range with roughly equal numbers of those of below and above average ability. The proportion of pupils who achieve the expected levels in the national tests at the end of Year 9 is also very close to the national average, showing that the majority make steady progress through the first two years of their high school career.

7. Results in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) are more mixed. More-able pupils make good progress through Key Stage 4 and achieve good results; the progress made by pupils of middle and lower ability is slower, and their results are well below average. The half of the pupils who stay into the sixth form make good progress; their results at GNVQ and A level are excellent. Overall, therefore, Droitwich Spa High School adds significant value for the more-able pupils, who achieve well; but the value added for pupils of moderate ability, many of whom under-achieve, is slight.

8. In recent years’ national tests at age fourteen, pupils’ attainment has been around the national average in all three core subjects (English, mathematics and science), and trends in the school’s results have mirrored the national upward trend. In 1999, the school’s results are again in line with the national average in all three core subjects. Girls achieve better results than boys, but by a much smaller margin than is the case nationally. Recent results are in line with those of similar schools in English and mathematics, but below them in science. Teachers’ assessments of pupils’ attainment in the other subjects show performances generally around the national average, with girls out-achieving boys.

9. Of the work observed in Key Stage 3, about three-quarters was at or above the expected level, with good attainment in English, D&T and geography. There is some under-achievement in mathematics and science, mostly among middle to lower ability pupils.

10. Except for a small number of pupils who left early in 1999, the school enters all of its pupils for GCSE examinations, and almost all achieve some success. The proportion of GCSE entries awarded the higher (A* - C) grades increased sharply in 1999. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more such grades has been around the national average in recent years, with a rising trend similar to the national rate of improvement, but below the performance of similar schools. This year, the results achieved by these more able pupils rose significantly - it is still close to the national average, but is now also in line with the figures achieved by similar schools. The average points per pupil (a measure of the quality of grades achieved across the school) is in line with the national average, but is below that of similar schools. Although girls have achieved better results than boys in recent years, the gap is less than that nationally. This goes some way to addressing the discrepancy raised as a key issue in the last inspection.

11. However, the school's GCSE results are below the national average for the proportion of its pupils who achieve at least one graded (A* - G) result, and for those who achieve at least five such results, and are well below those of similar schools. The results achieved by pupils with SEN are satisfactory, with most achieving at least one graded result.

12. Particularly good GCSE results have been achieved recently in business studies, design and technology (D&T), geography, physical education (PE), English literature, drama (although the entry for the last two is small), and in the short religious education (RE) course. Results in English and history are above the national average, especially for the highest grades. Results in mathematics are above the national average, but pupils tend to achieve better grades in their other subjects. Science results have improved in recent years and are good for able pupils, but show under-achievement for those of middle to lower ability. Modern language results are weak; a very small proportion enters GCSE, especially in two languages, and they achieve grades which are below both the national average and pupils' achievements in other subjects.

13. Results in English, PE, geography and RE in particular have improved from those reported at the time of the last inspection.

14. Of the work observed in Key Stage 4, about seventy per cent was at or above the expected level, with good standards in a third. Especially good work was seen in English, drama, D&T,

geography, and PE. In GNVQ courses in Key Stage 4, pupils of a wide range of ability achieve good results. The files of some pupils studying health and social care, leisure and tourism, and business studies at foundation level are well presented and contain a considerable output of well-researched work.

15. The school's A level results, in terms of both pass rates and the quality of grades achieved, are outstanding and have maintained their excellence and further improved over recent years. Work in the sixth form almost always matches the expectations of the course, and over half is of a high standard. For example, pupils show their skills and knowledge in the way they research information, present findings and dispute interpretation in psychology; follow and evaluate a complex argument in sociology; use role-play to examine character and motivation in English; and work together to conduct complex experiments in science. Although numbers entering in some subjects are small, excellent results have been achieved in many subjects, including chemistry, physics, computer science, economics, French, German, history, further mathematics, sport studies, sociology, theatre studies: the list is very long.

16. Results at GNVQ in the sixth form are very good and represent very good achievement and progress for the pupils who follow these courses. Some particularly good work was seen in advanced health and social care where the files of distinction candidates show work which is not only excellently organised but which also contain demanding assignments which are researched with flair and presented with care and imagination.

17. Among the core subjects, standards in English are good and rising. Test and examination results get stronger up the school, being in line with the national average in the Key Stage 3 tests, above the average at GCSE, and outstanding at A level. Pupils' work seen in lessons and in folders shows current standards to be somewhat higher than previous years' results and demonstrates the rising trend. Results in mathematics and science are also in line with the national average at the end of Key Stage 3, and both subjects achieve excellent A level results. Their results at GCSE and pupils' current work in these subjects show that there is some under-achievement among pupils of middle to lower ability.

18. The great majority of pupils are making at least sound progress, and for some it is good. Parents expressed their satisfaction with the progress made by their children, including those with

SEN. Progress is steady from the national tests at the end of primary school to those at the end of Key Stage 3, with slightly more rapid progress for more-able pupils. Pupils with SEN make good progress across this key stage; they receive good quality specialist support, and their good individual education plans (IEPs) help subject teachers address their needs accurately. Pupils with behavioural problems increase the time they spend on task; they learn to follow instructions, to listen to others, and to wait their turn.

19. Progress is more varied in Key Stage 4. For high-ability pupils progress accelerates, promoted by good teaching and schemes of work which have a clear focus on the demands of the GCSE examinations. For pupils with SEN, the rapid progress of Key Stage 3 slows to satisfactory as the amount of specialist teaching and support diminishes. For pupils in middle-to lower-ability sets, progress slows to satisfactory or below; teaching is less good for these pupils, and the attendance rate in some sets falls, further inhibiting progress.

20. In the sixth form, progress is rapid; in both GNVQ and A level classes, pupils are helped to settle quickly to the demands of the new courses and receive teaching which is skilled and which understands the demands of the courses and examinations intimately. The small number of pupils with SEN in the sixth form receive good support and make good progress.

21. Progress is clearly linked to teaching quality and attendance. Pupils of all abilities and all ages achieve good progress when they understand:

- the objectives of the course or lesson;
- the criteria by which their work is assessed;
- the strengths and weaknesses of their work and how to improve it.

These criteria are met particularly in the GNVQ courses in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, and in A level courses.

22. Among subjects, progress is particularly rapid across the school in English and PE; these subjects plan carefully for progression, ensuring that schemes of work and agreed teaching styles enable pupils to move rapidly through the work. In art, RE and history, progress accelerates up the school, while science and IT in particular display the slowing of progress in Key Stage 4. The progress of pupils with SEN also slows in Key Stage 4, because the specialist support which promotes their progress in the earlier key stage is reduced.

23. Progress was judged to be sound or better in eighty-seven per cent of lessons, and good or very good in over forty per cent. These are satisfactory proportions. The slow progress in a small number of lessons is linked with teaching which is poorly matched to pupils' abilities, and with the rare examples of poor behaviour.

24. Standards and progress in the key skills - reading, writing, speaking and listening, numeracy and IT - across the curriculum are generally sound. On entry to the school, most pupils read well. Throughout the school, especially when they are supported in Key Stage 3, the reading of pupils with SEN improves well. Most pupils read accurately and fluently, with understanding and discrimination. Outside the departments of English and SEN, there is no planned attempt to address pupils' literacy, although most subjects contribute.

25. The concept of improving writing, rather than just tidying it, through drafting, is under-developed except in English, and is not helped by the lack of IT equipment. Pupils' writing is sound, but opportunities for extended writing are limited. Pupils of modest ability, including those with SEN, do not make rapid progress in their writing. Many departments would benefit from the structures to support writing being used in the English and SEN departments.

26. Pupils speak well in a variety of settings, with pupils of all abilities answering at length, not just with monosyllables. They also listen with understanding and respond well to teachers. Lessons and extra-curricular activities such as council meetings provide many opportunities to practise both speaking and listening. In some subjects, such as mathematics, speaking and listening to each other are not developed below the sixth form. Drama makes a very good contribution to the skills of speaking and listening for those who study it.

27. Standards of numeracy are sound, and schemes of work in many subjects, including science, geography, D&T, PE, economics and business studies, and GNVQ contribute significantly to the development of pupils' numeracy. There is however no planned programme to develop numeracy across the curriculum.

28. IT is used in many subjects but, partly as a result of the lack of equipment but also because there is no coherent policy and scheme of work across the curriculum and, because

teachers are not as fluent with IT in their subjects as they should be, it is not developed strongly, and pupils' skills are lower than they should be. GNVQ courses make genuine and successful efforts to plan a broad and systematic programme of ICT into their work.

Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

29. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good and make a considerable contribution to their progress, as they did at the time of the last inspection. Behaviour has improved still further since 1995.

30. Pupils speak positively of the school and in almost all lessons they sustain good levels of concentration and enthusiasm. In English they work with commitment and in science they undertake practical activities safely and sensibly. In RE pupils are prepared to express their feelings and thoughts and in PSHE boys talk confidently in sex education lessons. In history lessons, A level pupils have a strong commitment to learning and in music they apply themselves well to their studies. Where pupils are given the opportunity, they take responsibility for their own learning and are able to work independently. In art in Key Stage 4 pupils are able to make individual choices and they seek advice to improve their work. In English they develop their research skills. Pupils with SEN respond well in the majority of lessons and display good skills in managing their own behaviour. They have a positive attitude to their work and help each other to overcome difficulties.

31. The behaviour of all pupils around the school is very good and in most lessons it is good. Pupils are welcoming to visitors and respect property and equipment. The levels of fixed-term and permanent exclusions are high and are above the average for similar schools. The majority of incidents which result in exclusion are related to inappropriate and disrespectful behaviour towards adults. Pupils and parents recognise the school's aim to establish a high standard of behaviour and understand the firm position taken by the school during the last two years. The school has made preparations to meet new statutory guidance on the management of exclusions.

32. Relationships among pupils and between pupils and teachers are very good. Pupils from all backgrounds get on well together and there is a strong sense of community within the year groups, houses and at whole-school level. Incidents of bullying are few and are seen to be dealt with firmly by teachers. In lessons pupils maintain good levels of courtesy and are respectful of

the views of others. In a PSHE lesson, in a discussion on the issues faced in teenage pregnancy, pupils showed sensitivity towards each other and to the visitor from a local Young Mums' group. When given the opportunity pupils enjoy working together. In IT they help each other resolve problems with equipment and in PE they share experiences and coaching skills. In an English lesson, pupils with SEN gave strong encouragement to their peers who lacked confidence in their reading.

33. Pupils' capacity to show initiative and to take responsibility is excellent. In a wide range of activities pupils of all ages display leadership skills and a mature ability to manage their own affairs. Pupils take full responsibility for the annual school production, managing key aspects such as directing, music, choreography, staging and lighting. In conducting the meetings of the year group councils and the school council, sixth formers ensure that the business is addressed and that younger pupils have the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. The tutor group representatives take their responsibilities seriously and express with confidence the concerns of their peers. In a meeting of a school council committee with the catering service, pupils presented an exemplary model of assertive but polite behaviour in seeking to put across their point of view. Pupils have enthusiastically taken up the challenge of running the houses. Aply led by sixth formers in elected posts of responsibility, they devise and organise a good range of sports coaching and competitions, a variety show and charity fund-raising events. A small group of pupils develop their skills in editing, marketing and financial management in their work on the Year 11 year book. Pupils in Year 8 present their views on the school to middle school pupils and in Year 9 pupils organise Christmas presents for local senior citizens. Year 10 pupils worked with teachers on the development of the report booklet intended to monitor and promote pupils' behaviour and attitudes in lessons. Sixth formers support younger pupils with their reading and contribute to the Year 11 mentoring scheme.

Attendance

34. In the years since the last inspection, attendance has averaged over ninety per cent; the figure fell to ninety per cent last year during a period when the school did not have the benefit of an education welfare officer (EWO). This year, with a new EWO in place, attendance has risen to ninety two per cent. Attendance is slightly below average for comprehensive schools, but the level of unauthorised absence is better than the national average.

35. Attendance in the sixth form is good, but it is low among lower ability groups in Key Stage 4, inhibiting their progress.

36. Punctuality is good and lessons start and finish on time. However, a small number of pupils do not move briskly enough to afternoon registration at the end of the school day. Registration procedures are efficient and conform to requirements.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

Teaching

37. Teaching is of sound to good quality overall. Ninety per cent of the teaching observed was judged sound or better, and nearly half was good, very good or excellent. These proportions are close to the national average, and maintain the quality reported at the time of the previous inspection. Teaching is sound to good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and, as in the 1995 inspection, it is of high quality in the sixth form, where almost all teaching observed was sound or better, and nearly three-quarters was good, very good or excellent. Despite its overall quality, there are distinct weaknesses in about ten per cent of the teaching which the school should address.

38. Across the age range and the subjects, teachers know their subjects well, and provide pupils with confident subject leadership. The small amount of non-specialist teaching is of good quality. Teachers prepare lessons well, use their time and resources well, and have good relationships with their pupils. Behaviour in lessons is generally good, and teachers in most lessons can get on with the job of teaching without wasting time. However, in some lower ability sets in Key Stage 4, for example in science, too much time is spent managing behaviour rather than teaching. Homework is generally sufficient in quantity. Marking varies among subjects; while it is carried out regularly by most teachers, not all departments ensure that comments are helpful to

pupils in guiding their improvement, and few use the results of marking and assessment to guide improvements to teaching and to the curriculum.

39. The quality of teaching is not uniform across the ability range; whereas higher ability sets are generally well taught, a high proportion of the unsatisfactory teaching is concentrated in lower sets, especially in Key Stage 4. Teaching of pupils with SEN by specialist teachers is good in Key Stage 3, but the quality falls for pupils in slightly more able sets in this key stage, and for the lower half of the ability range in Key Stage 4. The impact of this weaker teaching is to be found in the under-achievement at the middle grades of GCSE, compared with the high achievement for top GCSE sets and at A level.

40. Neither is teaching quality distributed uniformly across the subjects. In English there is a high proportion of good teaching, with some which is excellent; the teaching of lower sets is weaker. In mathematics, over half of the teaching is good and very good, but a third is unsatisfactory, badly matched to the abilities of the pupils across the ability range in Key Stages 3 and 4. In science, half of the teaching is good or very good but a fifth is unsatisfactory, almost all of it with lower sets in Key Stage 4. Teaching is generally of a good standard in history, PE, sixth form GNVQ and in the small amount of music observed; it is mostly sound to good, with a trailing edge of unsatisfactory teaching, mostly in Key Stage 4, in the other subjects. Although the sample was small, some good and excellent practice was observed in psychology, sociology and economics in the sixth form.

41. The teaching by specialist SEN staff, including the one-to-one work undertaken by the specialist support assistants (SSAs), is good. Teachers are firm but fair in their discipline and are skilled in using unobtrusive methods such as a glance or a quiet word to keep pupils on task. Lessons are very carefully planned with the tasks being broken down into small, manageable steps. Teachers are clear and precise in their explanations, and model the activity well so that the pupils know precisely what it is that they are expected to do. Effective use is made of the strategies suggested in the pupils' IEPs and good examples of this occurred in lessons taught by the SEN specialist as well as in PE and art. Where they are well deployed by the teacher, SSAs make a good contribution to the quality of the teaching and the learning.

42. The teaching of literacy and numeracy, where it takes place, is good; such teaching tends

to be in pockets, not adding up to a whole-school, consistent approach.

43. Across the school, in the best lessons, brisk pace and challenging tasks bring the best out in pupils; in particular, good questioning probes and develops their understanding. Teachers of these lessons had planned interesting and lively ways of addressing the topics, enabling pupils to learn from each other and helping them develop their skills as learners. In an excellent A level psychology lesson, the teacher had designed a way of addressing a complex topic which enabled pupils to collect and share information, challenge and support each other, and analyse what they had learned and the progress they had made. As preparation for university styles of learning, this lesson could hardly be bettered. This commitment to open discussion, with well-judged interventions by the teacher to probe and summarise, is also found in the several very good and excellent English lessons at all levels in the school. In PE, even the youngest pupils are encouraged to lead warm-up sessions and to evaluate what they have learned and how they can improve. A high proportion of the best teaching is in the sixth form, where teachers' profound understanding of both their subject and the requirements of the course ensure thorough examination preparation; this is true of much A level mathematics and sociology teaching for example.

44. The less than satisfactory teaching is characterised by slow pace and under-expectation, and by lack of thought about how best to teach a particular topic to a particular group of pupils.

45. The match of work to the needs and abilities of pupils was a key issue in the last inspection. Whilst there has been some progress in this respect there is room for further improvement as this is the weakness that typifies much of the unsatisfactory teaching. Teachers are not clear enough about the precise objectives of the lesson and some tasks are therefore over-complicated. For example, a Key Stage 3 class learning to use the correct format for writing letters was, at the same time, required to process a large amount of information for inclusion within their writing. A high proportion of mathematics teaching is undemanding and does not promote progress

The curriculum and assessment

46. The quality of the curriculum provision is satisfactory overall and good in the sixth form. Since the previous inspection, the teaching time available has been increased and now meets recommendations. Provision for RE at Key Stage 3 is now satisfactory and the PE curriculum has

been improved.

47. The breadth and balance of the curriculum at Key Stage 3 are good. The full National Curriculum including RE is provided and the school has addressed a number of issues since the last inspection. At Key Stage 4 all pupils study GCSE courses in English, mathematics and science, select from a range of options at both GCSE and GNVQ foundation levels and follow courses in RE, PE and personal, social and health education. However there are some aspects of the Key Stage 4 curriculum which are unsatisfactory. The school does not comply with the statutory requirement to teach IT at this stage. Pupils studying three sciences receive a restricted amount of RE and are unable to study the subject to GCSE level. The structure of the option system makes some contribution to the very low take-up of a second foreign language. Furthermore, the blocking of the performing arts subjects against history and geography restricts the breadth of the curriculum for some pupils who are forced to choose between subjects in which they are equally talented.

48. Sixth form pupils follow a core programme of key skills which can lead to an A-level qualification in general studies, and personal, social and health education. Pupils can also resit English and mathematics at GCSE. The arrangements in the sixth form provide appropriate breadth for the pupils and enable them to construct a timetable from a selection of A level subjects and GNVQ Intermediate and Advanced courses that is relevant to their individual interests and aptitudes.

49. The provision for pupils with SEN is satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4 and good in the sixth form. Pupils with statements of SEN receive good support to help them access the curriculum. However, for other pupils on the school's SEN register the provision is inconsistent. Whilst the setting system helps the school focus its resources upon particular teaching groups, the quality of the provision is dependent upon the ability of individual teachers to work effectively with classes of pupils with learning difficulties. There is also insufficient support for some pupils with SEN in the practical subjects.

50. Planning for progression and continuity, an issue raised at the previous inspection, is good in the sixth form, satisfactory in Key Stage 4 but unsatisfactory in Key Stage 3. Because the pupils arrive having already studied the first year of the Key Stage 3 programme of study at middle

schools, subject liaison meetings with other schools have been arranged. Most have been successful but work remains to be done in some subjects, such as music. Several subjects require further development to ensure that the teaching builds systematically upon the pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills.

51. Extra-curricular provision is good and in sport and the performing arts it is very good. Clubs and activities are offered before, during and after school and involve art, dance, drama, music, computing, technology and a very wide range of sports. In addition there are visits and trips to the theatre, concerts and major sporting events, as well as educational visits to and exchanges with European countries.

52. The school's provision for careers education and guidance is good. The school has a dedicated careers room and pupils receive a good range of impartial advice and practice in developing interviewing techniques from the careers service, the Rotary Club and the Business Mentoring Programme. Key Stage 4 pupils and sixth form pupils following vocational courses undertake work experience with local employers. Through the Compact Scheme pupils in Key Stage 4 have the opportunity to take part in Project 19 which offers them vocational training and work experience.

53. The personal, social and health education programme, including sex education and attention to drug misuse, is good at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. However, the reduction in the time allocated to this aspect in Key Stage 4 restricts the content that can be covered.

54. Procedures for assessing the attainment of pupils are satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4 and good in the sixth form. There is a detailed assessment and reporting policy which identifies how work is to be marked and assessed. Pupils are formally assessed through end of Key Stage 3 tests, GCSE, GNVQ and A level examinations. Whilst teachers' judgements about the performance of pupils in relation to completed work are generally sound, the use of assessment to diagnose weaknesses and determine how pupils can improve are inconsistent. Whilst some teachers are very perceptive in this respect there are several instances when the pupils' work is merely corrected and even when aspects for improvement are identified they are sometimes too vague or inappropriate. For example, a pupil whose use of simple sentence punctuation was erratic was instructed to "use paragraphs".

55. The use of assessment to inform curriculum planning is satisfactory in the sixth form but unsatisfactory in Key Stages 3 and 4. The school has recently begun to use test data to analyse pupils' performance and to set targets. The links between those targets and the actions necessary for achieving them have yet to be forged and much work is required for this to be successful. Subject departments are being required to produce detailed action plans to illustrate how teaching will identify and address weaknesses in the pupils' learning and how monitoring and evaluation systems will measure the effectiveness of those strategies. This is a major area for the school's development.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

56. The school's values are clearly reflected in its aim to recognise and develop the potential of all pupils and to foster a sense of community where consultation and decision-making are an entitlement for all. Its policies and day-to-day practice ensure that learning takes place in an orderly, respectful and welcoming environment. The strong group identity developed within the sixth form makes a considerable contribution to the positive ethos of the school. Parents consider that the school contributes effectively to the development of pupils' own attitudes and values. Adults in the school provide good models for pupils.

57. The provision for pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory. The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship, but the programme of good assemblies enables pupils to consider moral and social issues and to understand the relevance of these to the development of personal skills and qualities. This was most effective in a sixth form assembly on Armistice where the presentation provided a powerful opportunity for pupils to reflect on the impact of World War 1 on life at the time. The assemblies are well planned to provide contributions from pupils and to stimulate their interest, but the timing of the assembly at the end of the day results in limited opportunity for quiet reflection. In RE pupils explore the beliefs and values of other faiths and in the sixth form they debate morality and ethical issues. However the contribution of other subjects in the curriculum to the provision for spiritual development is not clearly identified and is therefore under-developed.

58. The provision for pupils' moral development is good, and parents appreciate the values and attitudes the school seeks to develop. The code of conduct, in setting out the rights and

responsibilities of pupils and teachers, establishes a strong set of shared values which underpins the school community. Parents appreciate the values and attitudes which the school seeks to develop.

The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme and pastoral support system are used effectively to develop pupils' understanding of the principles of right and wrong. In PSHE pupils learn about the purpose of rules and laws in society and are able to see this in action through a visit to a magistrates court. In drug education lessons the Community Drugs Team explores issues of law with pupils. In the wider curriculum pupils consider moral and ethical issues such as in geography when they study the impact of trade and third-world debt, and in history lessons on the reign of terror in Stalinist Russia. In RE, pupils apply key beliefs and principles in a range of situations and thereby consider the implications of living by a moral code.

59. The provision for pupils' social development is very good and has some excellent features. The PSHE and careers education programmes have been considerably improved since the last inspection and make a significant contribution to pupils' personal and social development. Teaching is well planned but the curriculum arrangements for PSHE in Key Stage 4 do not provide adequate continuity and progression in pupils' learning. PSHE is taught by a designated team of teachers and covers important aspects of health education such as drugs and sex education, as well as bullying, citizenship and water, road and rail safety. Teachers successfully create a learning environment where boys and girls are able to listen carefully to each other's opinions and can confidently discuss sensitive issues such as contraception. There are very good links with outside agencies such as a local Young Mums group, the police, fire and health services, the youth service and the Droitwich Single Homeless Project. A good programme of careers education is provided from Year 9 and careers resources are available to all pupils. The programme is enhanced by the services of careers advisers and during the inspection a theatre company provided a stimulating presentation on options and career choices.

60. The school makes excellent provision for pupils to experience leadership and responsibility and to work together for the benefit of others. Pupils contribute effectively to decision making in the school through year-group councils and the school council which are led by the head and deputy head girl and boy and members of the sixth form. The councils are managed by the pupils themselves with heads of year and the senior management team (SMT) providing guidance only when requested. In the past pupils have been consulted on the review of the pastoral system and the development of the rewards process. During the inspection representatives from the school

council met with the manager of the catering service to discuss improvements to lunch arrangements while the full council debated the future of the parents/teachers association at the request of its chair. The annual musical production and the twice-weekly school bank enable pupils to take considerable responsibility on behalf of others.

61. The house system was redeveloped with the clear intention that pupils should manage their own affairs. House captains, sports captains and social secretaries are all elected by pupils and are responsible for planning and delivering a range of school events such as inter-house sports competitions and fund-raising activities in charities week. Prefects drawn from the houses support teachers through a rota of duties around the school. In the sixth form the Changemakers projects provide pupils with the opportunity for community service with activities ranging from life-saving and paper recycling to repainting an adventure playground and helping younger pupils with reading.

62. Through the curriculum, opportunities for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning and to work together are more limited. In PE, science and D&T pupils are encouraged to collaborate and they experience the benefits of team work. In other subjects, little interaction between pupils is encouraged below the sixth form.

63. The provision for pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. At a whole-school level, provision is good, including the good range of music and arts events, including an annual rock band competition and musical production, a variety show and concerts involving the school choir and orchestra. Pupils perform in the county arts festival and in the shopping precinct and contribute to services in Worcester Cathedral. Recently the school has been working with a local architect and an artist to design and develop artwork for the school foyer. The curriculum is enhanced by a good range of educational visits and exchanges including trips to Morocco and the USA. However, opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of local and particularly multi-cultural issues are under-developed across the subjects of the curriculum.

Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

64. The school provides a secure and pleasant learning environment which has a strong sense of community and where individual pupils are valued. The recently established pastoral and house systems make a significant contribution to educational standards, and represent a further

improvement from the situation at the time of the last inspection. A well co-ordinated structure involving the SMT, heads of lower and upper school, heads of year and form tutors ensures that pupils receive effective support and guidance on a day-to-day basis. The opportunities for personal and social development provided through the house activities and events are considerable. Pupils and parents value the care and concern shown by teachers, particularly at key points in their school life such as when making option choices. Teachers are seen as approachable and responsive to pupils' needs, and relationships across the school are very good. The provision in these aspects of the school's work has a strongly positive impact on the standards pupils achieve.

65. The school has good systems and procedures, spoken of with appreciation by parents, to monitor and promote pupils' academic progress, behaviour and attendance. Targets are agreed with all pupils and the degree to which they are achieved is commented on in reports to parents. The progress of sixth form pupils is monitored through contracts which establish agreed expectations of behaviour and performance. A detailed monitoring sheet for Year 11 pupils has recently been developed which enables tutors to identify those pupils who would benefit from additional support. A recently-introduced mentoring process for Year 11 pupils aims to raise standards of achievement in GCSE examinations and contracts are agreed with Year 9 pupils following an audit of their performance in all subjects at the end of Year 8. A four-week report booklet is used effectively in Year 10 to support pupils whose behaviour or performance is causing concern. Time is allocated for tutor periods but the current arrangement leaves tutors with limited time to carry out their responsibilities to the full.

66. There are very good procedures in place to promote high standards of behaviour and good relationships throughout the school. The well-structured behaviour and discipline policy has clear expectations of pupils and staff. The code of conduct, displayed in all classrooms, has a strong focus on care and respect for self and others. All pupils receive a 'credit card' which lists the expected standards of behaviour of teachers and pupils. The systems of rewards and sanctions are understood by pupils and they recognise how the school promotes and maintains acceptable standards of behaviour. Records of incidents are kept on pupils' files and tutors keep a list of awards and certificates. Formal analysis of these and the sharing of strategies at a year-group or whole-school level would greatly enhance the school's ability to monitor trends and would enable tutors to be more proactive in their support of pupils.

67. The seven principles of the anti-bullying policy give clear messages to pupils about the unacceptability of bullying and the right to tell. Parents and pupils feel that when bullying does occur, it is handled quickly and effectively by teachers. Parents welcome the clear line taken by the school on attendance, behaviour and bullying.

68. The pastoral support for pupils with SEN is good, enabling them to make good progress in relation to their IEPs. A 'casework' approach has been developed for tutor groups with pupils of lower ability where teachers discuss strategies to support their progress and attainment. In Key Stage 4 pupils participate in the compact scheme and are supported through a homework club.

69. The school makes good provision for pupils who are considered to be disaffected or at risk of exclusion. A student counsellor provides befriending and advocacy support for targeted pupils. Some pupils also attend weekly groupwork sessions run by the youth service and the student counsellor. These sessions focus on raising pupils' self-esteem, improving their behaviour and developing a more positive approach to learning. Over time this provision has been successful in helping pupils resolve their difficulties and retaining them in learning, with some pupils staying on into the sixth form.

70. The arrangements for monitoring, recording and promoting attendance are good. Measures to follow up lateness and absence are in place. A mentoring process for Year 11 pupils successfully brings together teachers, pupils and parents to agree strategies to improve their level of attendance. In Years 8 and 9 a weekly punctuality and uniform score for each tutor group is presented in a league table and pupils compete enthusiastically for a trophy. Reception staff are welcoming and encouraging to pupils known to have attendance difficulties.

71. The school complies with the statutory requirements for child protection. The nominated teachers have received training and teachers understand the school's policy and procedures. Pupils' awareness of child protection issues is promoted through the PSHE programme.

72. The school has very good arrangements for promoting the health, safety and well being of pupils. Appropriate systems are in place to enable the senior management team and the governing body to monitor the provision of safe and healthy working conditions for pupils and staff, and for them to meet their statutory responsibilities. Risk assessments are regularly carried out and pupils

are trained in the safe use of equipment. The state of services, especially water and ventilation, in some science laboratories is poor, inhibiting pupils' progress and posing hazards to health. Medical facilities and first aid arrangements are good and are easily accessible to pupils. The school nurse provides a confidential drop-in clinic for pupils to discuss health issues and concerns. Through this and the PSHE programme pupils gain information on community-based services such as a young people's advice centre.

Partnership with parents and the community

73. Partnerships with parents and the community are good. They have a significant and positive impact on pupils' attainment and progress.

74. Parental involvement in the life of the school and in pupils' learning is satisfactory. The school positively encourages and welcomes parents to become involved in school life. The parents and teachers association (PTA) provides valuable support for the school through fund-raising. Considerable funds are raised at events such as fashion shows and discos. Money raised by the PTA has gone towards buying useful resources for the school, including equipment and learning resources. However, the PTA has recently suspended its work. A strong feature of this school is its innovative approach to situations. The school is currently considering a radically different structure for a community forum comprising parents, teachers, pupils and community members. Some parents help in school regularly. They assist in classrooms, support lessons for pupils with special educational needs and help with extra-curricular activities. Parents work effectively with staff. Student diaries and planners show that parents' involvement in their children's learning at home is satisfactory.

75. There is a close and effective partnership with parents of pupils with SEN. Parents are kept fully informed of the progress that their child is making and the outcomes of any assessment procedures, including reviews of IEPs. Attendance at and contributions to the annual reviews by parents of pupils with statements of SEN are very good; parents, at the meeting and in their written submissions to the registered inspector, praised the support which the SEN department gives to pupils and parents.

76. Information to parents is good. Parents new to the school are provided with a comprehensive information pack which includes a very helpful 'New Pupils Guide' which explains

school routines and procedures. The reception area has been modified since the last inspection and provides a very positive image with many user-friendly features. A number of notice-boards around the school draw parents attention effectively to a wide range of matters and educational issues. The school has recently updated its brochure and prospectus for the sixth form and both are of high quality. They give useful and very well-presented information to parents. Many booklets are freely available about specific school provisions. For example, there are handy leaflets about the use of student planners and the school's arrangements for pupils with SEN. Monthly newsletters are issued to parents including key dates and details of forthcoming events. In addition to parents' evenings where parents can speak to staff about their children's progress, parents can also exchange views and share their concerns at an annual headteacher's meeting. Pupils' annual reports are of good quality. They inform parents clearly about what their children know, can do and understand. The school regularly organises information sessions for parents. For example, these have included drugs education and options evenings.

77. Parents are critical of the timing of reports and parents' evenings, feeling that they fall too late in the year to inform them of the progress of their children, especially when they embark on new courses. The school acknowledges that this was a justified criticism, and this year has moved some dates and put in a short progress report to parents early in the school year.

78. Links with the community are very good. This represents considerable improvement from the good quality of links found at the last inspection. Inspectors were very impressed by the commitment of the local community to the school. The community works very closely with the school and is very appreciative of its efforts and effectiveness. School trips are well planned to support the curriculum and project work. Venues include museums, art galleries and environmental areas. There are very good links to support PSHE lessons. For example, Year 8 and Year 9 pupils recently did well in a mock trial competition through the Droitwich Spa Magistrates' Court. This made a good contribution to developing pupils' confidence and advocacy skills. The school has effective links with the church. Members of the clergy from Droitwich Spa chapel and the baptist church regularly lead school assemblies, and this makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development. The school has well-established and wide-ranging sports links. They make a considerable contribution to pupils' physical education through specialist coaching in sports such as rugby and netball. The school also has effective partnerships with local universities and acts as a work experience provider for many students as part of their teacher training. Pupils

benefit positively from the additional support in lessons.

79. There are very good links with local businesses. Many employers provide work experience for Year 10 pupils in a wide range of jobs and professions. Industry days organised by the school are well supported by the business community and they provide valuable careers information for pupils. The partnership with the Rotary Club recently resulted in a high quality job-hunting experience for many pupils. They were able to apply for jobs and attend mock interviews which provided them with invaluable feedback and experience. Other examples of effective collaboration include the creation of the reception area. Several pupils worked very closely with a local architect who developed pupils' ideas and designs.

80. The school has good and effective links with middle schools in the area. There are regular and frequent meetings between curriculum co-ordinators and senior management. Staff liaise effectively regarding the transfer of pupils' records and this ensures a smooth transition to Key Stage 3. The school has successfully addressed the issue of the last inspection concerning links with the middle schools in most subjects, but there is work to do in some, such as music.

THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

Leadership and management

81. At the time of the last inspection, management at Droitwich Spa High School was said to have strengths, such as supportive governors, a good SMT and good routine administration; there were, however, deficiencies in communication and in the way the school evaluated its practice and planned for improvement on the basis of that evaluation. The school had only recently begun to compile a development plan.

82. In the last two years, since the appointment of the current headteacher, the strengths have been built on, and vigorous efforts have begun to address the deficiencies. The school is now very well led by the headteacher and his newly-constituted SMT, with good support from the governing body. Governors are formed into well-chosen committees with clear terms of reference. These arrangements are good, resulting in strong support to the school and developing into effective means for governors to monitor progress. There is a clear educational direction centred on raising achievement in Key Stages 3 and 4, especially for pupils of moderate ability, with a focus on improved teaching and learning as the means of achieving the desired improvement. The school development plan (SDP) sets out a reasoned set of shorter-term strategies clearly linked to achieving the goal; governors have played their part in setting the direction and priorities of this plan, and are beginning to hold the school to account for its execution. The current plan is thorough rather than clear and punchy; it would help all readers were it to have a clearer summary, and more clearly-spelled-out links to spending. The way the teaching and learning theme of the SDP has been implemented through policies, staff training and the monitoring carried out by the SMT shows how well senior staff carry plans through into action; the school's aims are well implemented.

83. Developments in the last two years have been based on a foundation of excellent organisation and a very full and helpful set of policies; all of this represents a considerable achievement in a relatively short time. All matters of routine organisation are excellent. With the support of very capable and helpful teams of office and site staff, the school runs very smoothly. Meetings, briefings and newsletters are very well-organised, and documents are produced to an excellent standard.

84. In recent years, the school has become much more effective in providing data on the

performance (mainly academic, but also in terms of attendance and behaviour) of pupils in an easily-analysed form. This has had the effect of raising teachers' awareness of areas of over- and under-achievement, and is beginning to raise their expectations. The culture of setting targets for and with pupils on the basis of well-authenticated data is now good, and is still improving. The aspect for development is to close the loop of improvement by establishing what all the information about pupils' achievement means for subject schemes of work and for teaching methods.

85. The lead from SMT is very strong but the response from middle management is variable. English, GNVQ, SEN and PE are well led. These departments monitor their work, including the quality of teaching, and plan for improvement based on what the monitoring reveals; their plans therefore contain clear improvement targets. The new head of English, in the few weeks she has worked at the school, has observed all members of the department teaching and has fed back several shrewd reflections which have helped formulate a strong set of departmental expectations and working practices and the beginnings of a good departmental improvement plan. The disparate teams of GNVQ and SEN teachers are well led. The internal verification procedures are used intelligently by the GNVQ co-ordinator to help draw up plans for the improvement of performance, and the head of SEN helps teachers manage the learning of pupils with SEN by discussing those pupils' needs as set out in good IEPs. This, together with a very useful SEN Handbook which details effective teaching strategies, has allowed the head of SEN to make good progress in addressing an issue from the previous inspection concerning raising the staff's awareness of special needs issues. Led by the head of department, teachers of PE maintain a discourse about the teaching of the subject which creates a culture of improvement.

86. Several heads of departments are experienced managers who have built sound teaching teams and an effective learning environment; management for maintenance is good in these departments, but leadership for improvement is relatively weak. The lack of monitoring in history, art and geography, all well-managed departments, means that best practice is not being shared and therefore standards are not rising as fast as they might. Departmental development plans, while several have good links with the over-arching SDP, often lack clear targets by which their success may be judged. Leadership of modern languages is poor and has contributed significantly to low morale in the department and to its disappointing performance. Leadership in science has had insufficient impact on the under-performance by middle- and lower-ability pupils and on the weaknesses in teaching in the subject.

87. Heads of year and school are developing into an effective team with an increasing impact on pupils' attainment. They have long-established traditions of providing high-quality care and guidance, and are beginning to bring together the strands of raising achievement, including through pupils' attendance and behaviour. The ethos of the school is lively and positive.

88. Most statutory requirements are met. The prospectus and annual reports to parents fully meet legal requirements. Statutory and recommended policies are in place, are of good quality and inform practice. Health and safety procedures are generally good. Staff appraisal fell into disrepair and latterly has been suspended; the changes to national regulations should be used as a lever to bring an effective system back into operation. The requirement to teach IT in Key Stage 4 and RE in the sixth form are not met. The last inspection concluded that the school did not meet the requirement for a daily act of collective worship. Assemblies are good; they celebrate achievement, make significant contributions to pupils' spiritual, moral and social development, and help build the school's ethos and values. However, as the governors and SMT are aware, they still do not meet the requirement for a daily act of collective worship.

Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

Staffing

89. The number, qualifications and experience of both teachers and support staff are good and sufficient to meet the needs of the school. Teachers new in September have been well integrated into the school. Many teachers have served in the school for a long time but there have been a number of appointments in the last two years at all levels including the headteacher. Deployment of teachers is effective and the match between qualifications and subjects taught is good. Support staff who work with pupils with SEN have appropriate qualifications and experience, and provide effective help to these pupils. There is inadequate support for pupils with SEN in some practical lessons. There are sufficient well-qualified administrative staff to enable the school run smoothly. Cleaning and care-taking staff ensure the school is kept clean, tidy and in good order, except in the resistant materials area.

90. Arrangements for the induction of new teachers are generally good and meet the requirements, but in some departments more specific subject support is needed. The arrangements for staff development are good; they are well organised and evaluated to ensure value for money.

The school has identified development of the role of middle managers, including their monitoring of teaching, as a priority. Inspection evidence supports this decision. Training in relation to subjects has had a positive impact on some departments, for example the use of assessment in art. However, there has been insufficient training across the school for IT, and a lack of discussion about teaching and learning and good classroom practice. There is currently no appraisal system to meet the statutory requirements.

Accommodation

91. Accommodation is generally good and this is an improvement from the last inspection. The school buildings are set in extensive and very pleasant grounds. More classrooms have been built since the last inspection. Classrooms are generally of a sufficient size to meet the needs of the curriculum. Some are of a good size, such as the art studios. However, some English and modern language classrooms, and also the library are a little cramped. Accommodation for the SEN department is excellent. The state of services in some science laboratories causes concern and inhibits pupils' progress.

92. The school has very good facilities for sports such as rugby, netball and tennis. Drainage is sometimes a problem on the playing fields during winter and the school is making positive efforts to improve it. The good partnership with the adjacent sports centre gives pupils additional facilities such as swimming. Elmbridge brook runs through the school grounds, and the school has its own pond and wildlife area. These features support the curriculum very well, for example in art, D&T and science. The school has several dedicated specialist teaching areas including IT rooms, careers interview rooms and a good size theatre for drama productions. There are many very good displays of pupils' work around the school and these are effective in promoting learning and stimulating pupils' interest in the curriculum. The school has maintained this strong feature since the last inspection. Storage space is adequate overall. The school buildings are well maintained with the exception of the quality of cleaning in the D&T block.

93. The school has addressed the majority of problems in accommodation since the last inspection. Much has been done to make the school grounds more attractive. The sixth form has been relocated to provide more space. The school has been innovative and effective in reducing overcrowding in corridors at times when pupils change classrooms, simply by altering procedures. However, a small number of inadequacies remain. There are insufficient rooms for assemblies and

there are not enough hard play areas.

Resources

94. Funding for resources is average and provision is satisfactory in most departments. However, for RE at Key Stage 3 both quality and quantity of resources are unsatisfactory. Resources for practical work in science are barely sufficient and much is old. The department does not have a long-term programme for the replacement of this equipment and at Key Stage 4 there are insufficient books for each teaching group, although the quality is satisfactory. In music there is a shortage of percussion instruments and in English there is a need for additional fiction in Key Stage 3.

95. There has been no real improvement in the provision for IT since the last inspection, although it is a priority for the school when funds permit. Parents are rightly critical of the provision. Two large rooms and one small room are equipped with outdated equipment. Some departments have access to their own computers but these also are dated and there is no coherent system of use. There has been an improvement in the library where there is good access to the Internet which is well used by pupils. Resources for pupils with SEN, including IT, have improved since the last inspection.

96. Progress has been made with library provision since the last inspection. The library has been relocated in a more central position, records show improving informal use by pupils but there is inconsistent planned use by departments for individual study and research. The stock of books has been improved recently by directed allocation of five per cent of departmental funding for library books. Some of the stock is dated and in some subject areas, for example history, does not cater for the full ability range.

97. The school makes satisfactory use of off-site facilities in some subjects which enhance the breadth of educational provision. There are, for example, visits to theatres in English and to Worcester as part of an art project. Opportunities for fieldwork in geography are not well developed.

The efficiency of the school

98. Overall the efficiency with which the school is run is good. The governors and the headteacher have a clear long-term view for the development of the school and where funds need to be deployed. The SDP has some costings attached. In the longer term, numbers are likely to rise in the school because of housing developments in the area. Numbers in the sixth form are also likely to increase since the school will draw from larger numbers in the main school. The school has these development well in hand. The financial and resources committee considers options and has a good grasp of the financial situation of the school.

99. Financial control is very good. A recent auditor's report raised minor issues that have been dealt with promptly. The bursar, who is a member of the SMT, is highly effective and fully involved with the planning and control of finances in the school. This involvement includes providing data for governors, the headteacher and heads of departments to ensure a careful check is kept on spending. A system has been introduced in the last two years to allocate resources to departments by formula, with an additional fund against which departments can bid for money for initiatives. Departmental spending is reviewed annually with a member of the SMT to ensure effective use of financial resources. Departments have been asked to set out longer-term costs for replacement of expensive equipment, but not all departments have yet done so. The day-to-day administration of the school is efficient and office staff have a range of expertise including IT. They have clearly defined roles and complement each other well.

100. In this financial year the school has no surplus in the budget, the result of adjustments to the original budget of April 1999 to accommodate a recalculation of the school's budget by the LEA. The school has good control of the situation in view of the projected rising numbers. The school's allocation of funding is for the most part in line with the average allocation for similar schools nationally. Funding to support pupils with SEN is used appropriately and the SEN department's budget is used efficiently. Money allocated for training and specific projects is used well.

101. Overall, the school makes satisfactory use of staff, learning resources and accommodation. The use of staff is efficient, with teachers' contact time in line with the national average. Appropriate arrangements have been made for newly qualified teachers. The staffing structure is well organised in departments, the pastoral system and for SEN. The co-ordination of GNVQ is good but co-ordination of IT across the curriculum is inconsistent. Resources are generally well

organised in lessons, but insufficient attention is given in some departments to resources for middle- and lower-attaining pupils. The library has been moved to the centre of the school, its use has improved but greater use could be made for independent learning and research. Elsewhere accommodation is generally well organised and used. The reception area is welcoming and the school benefits from generous circulation space and dining areas.

102. The budget share per pupil is low compared with similar schools. Pupils in the sixth form and Key Stage 3 make good progress; teaching is good; standards are in line with those of schools of similar type in Key Stage 3, and in the higher grades at GCSE, but are below them in the middle and lower grades. Standards in the sixth form are high. The school is working hard to improve standards still further but as yet gives only satisfactory value for money.

PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

English

103. This is a good department with the potential to become exceptional. At Key Stage 3, attainment in English has improved steadily since the time of the last inspection with both boys and girls achieving results above the national average in both tests and classwork. Girls out-perform boys by a margin in line with the national difference, a pattern which is repeated at the end of Key Stage 4. GCSE results are above the national average apart from the attainment of low-ability boys. A large proportion of pupils achieve the highest grade in English at GCSE. Although entry for English Literature is not offered currently to all pupils, a very high proportion gain the highest grade. This has an impact on recruitment to A level English, the results for which continue to be exceptional – well above the national average for comparable schools. GCSE Drama results, although the subject is taken by relatively small numbers of pupils, are good.

104. On the basis of their attainment on entry to the school, pupils make appropriate progress across the two key stages. The department's clear commitment to critical reading, extended writing and well-structured speaking and listening provides good support for the development of skills, knowledge and understanding. Advances in speaking and listening have been good since the last inspection.

105. The great majority of pupils across both key stages, including those with SEN, make satisfactory progress in their written work and become confident and capable in their writing in a variety of styles for a range of audiences. Many become adept at matching their writing to its purpose. Clear structures to support individual expression give pupils confidence to extend their capabilities. Standards of presentation and handwriting are good. By the end of Key Stage 4, most pupils are able to express themselves fluently and clearly using the conventions of standard English. Drafting is encouraged in both key stages and frequently leads to high quality written work. Note-taking by pupils in Year 11 and the sixth form is good and arises from systematic teaching of appropriate study skills in lower years. Good examples of writing were seen in response to literature, many of which were highly creative and original. Although pupils use ICT to produce neat and distinctive work, this tends to be the result of their own initiative and does not arise from teaching schemes. Progress in the sixth form is very good where mature and intelligent

pupils engage confidently with demanding texts and ideas.

106. Reading levels are good and pupils are encouraged and enabled to acquire critical skills which develop progressively across the school. As at the last inspection, although offered a range of written materials, pupils' use of reference and research skills are in need of development at Key Stage 3.

107. Speaking and listening are developing well with some very good examples of sustained and sophisticated role-plays and highly co-operative group-work. Good discussion within teacher-led lessons is a feature of the sixth form but in need of development at Key Stages 3 and 4 where pupils should be given more opportunities to initiate and challenge in their oral work. Consistently good work in drama enables pupils in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form to speak and listen with increasing sensitivity. Behaviour in lessons is good. Pupils are attentive, follow instructions carefully, show respect for each other and sustain effort and concentration over extended periods. Teachers' expectations are high; pupils respond well to the challenges set. However, the progress of some lower-ability pupils is impaired when inappropriate resources and teaching styles are used.

108. In the lessons observed, the vast majority of teaching was at least satisfactory and in over forty per cent of all lessons good or better. All drama teaching is good. Where the teaching is good, teachers provide clear structures for pupils' individual or collaborative work. The sharing of objectives at the lesson's start followed by a brisk pace with varied, linked activities characterises most of the teaching in the department.

109. The department is well led by a new head of department who has established an efficient and supportive approach in a very short time. Resources are of satisfactory quality and are being rapidly extended through appropriate investment. The departmental handbook is a model of its kind and the team of teachers work well together to well-understood priorities. The department meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. The arrangements for assessment are thorough and support pupil progress and improvement although some marking of work could provide more specific guidance for pupils. Recent innovations, such as the rationalisation of teaching rooms and resources and the closer collaboration between English and drama which was recommended at the last inspection, are having considerable impact on the quality of work in a department which is already effective.

110. Although good in some parts of the school, there is no sustained commitment to the coherent development of speaking and listening, reading and writing across the curriculum. Nevertheless, sixth form pupils make good use of language in all forms in most of their lessons.

111. The approaches to reading and writing in English which provide pupils with structures to extend their work in critical and creative ways are apparent in some other departments. Several areas of the curriculum make overt their expectations about language development – notably in the PE departmental handbook – and the use of key words, often by displaying them in classrooms, such as in D&T and history.

112. The English department's teaching of speaking and listening affords a good model for the development of these high level skills across the curriculum. The styles of learning in the department, the opportunities it provides for reflection on literature from many areas, and the consideration given to issues of morality all mean that the department makes a significant contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development.

Mathematics

113. Standards in mathematics at A level are very high. Recent results have consistently been well above national averages and the subject is popular. This represents further improvement on the positive findings of the last inspection. At GCSE, examination results are above the national average, but there is some under-performance, mainly among middle- to lower-ability pupils. Mathematics results tend to be lower than those achieved by pupils in their other subjects, and by pupils in similar schools. The trend since the last inspection has been one of maintenance rather than improvement. Standards in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 are similarly just above the national average and have improved slowly.

114. In lessons, sixth formers are attaining at high levels. In the rest of the school able pupils perform mathematical routines efficiently but are less skilled at broader mathematical thinking. The under-achievement of middle- and lower-ability pupils is not recognised or addressed. Selective work-sampling showed that high quality mathematics can be produced by pupils of all abilities in the school. The challenge is to increase the numbers of pupils working to these levels.

115. In number and algebra, attainment is generally satisfactory. Graph work tends to be good, with strong understanding and competence emerging in the sixth form. Attainment in shape and space and in data handling is satisfactory. The ability of pupils to use and apply their mathematics to non-routine problem solving or more open investigative situations is quite poor. Some of this facet of mathematical confidence appears to have been lost since the last inspection.

116. Within mathematics lessons graphical calculators were the only form of ICT seen in use. Reading and writing standards are mostly good but presentational care and accuracy by weaker pupils and boys were too variable. Talking and listening skills were satisfactory whilst the teacher was directly involved. Pupils were, however, given few opportunities to discuss productively amongst themselves, and here their skills were underdeveloped. Numeracy standards across the school are generally satisfactory, with some especially good practice in PE.

117. In the sixth form, pupils make rapid progress with their mathematics. The courses are well chosen and the teaching is confident and purposeful, backed by long experience of the demands of the examination. Through Key Stages 3 and 4 the progress of pupils of all abilities is steady but unremarkable. Interruptions to smooth progress are more prevalent in the lower key stage, caused by low expectations and the unimaginative use of teaching materials. In too many lessons pupils were busy doing undemanding tasks that were poorly chosen to move them forward in their knowledge or understanding of mathematics. Pupils with SEN make satisfactory progress in lower, smaller, sets where they receive greater attention. Some of these pupils have specific mathematical needs requiring more refined diagnosis and support.

118. The response of pupils to mathematics lessons is predominantly good and promotes their progress. Occasional incidents of unruly behaviour, and rather more frequent passive compliance, exhibited by some sets of all abilities when faced with extended periods of mediocre exposition and practice are having an impact on the proportions of pupils really exerting themselves to learn and make progress.

119. The department produces plenty of good, and some very good, teaching. However, this is not evenly distributed through the school, being concentrated in the sixth form. In the other key stages the quality is too varied, and teaching in over a third of lessons is unsatisfactory. Particularly in Key Stage 3, teaching in these lessons does not achieve adequate new learning for

enough of the class. The best teaching was when teachers took risks to promote pupils' understanding. Board work became careful and thoughtful and appropriate resources were chosen or created. Sub-groupings and open discussions enriched long sessions. There was a "no fear" atmosphere that supported conjecturing and allowed mistakes. Unsatisfactory lessons tended to have very brief lesson plans that mentioned what was to be taught and failed to give enough thought to exactly how it might be given impact and meaning. Occasionally, low expectations were compounded with inappropriate praise and discussion confused with chattering.

120. The mathematics curriculum fully meets statutory requirements. Since the last inspection its breadth has been improved by the integration of IT applications into schemes of work. Using and applying mathematics is insufficiently represented in the practice of pupils through Key Stages 3 and 4, affecting curriculum balance. There have been effective recent curriculum improvements in forming a stable A level teaching team, tracking pupils' progress and setting up a computerised record-keeping system. Curriculum continuity is supported by extensive functional schemes of work, but the raising of pupils' progress requires more staff collaboration on ideas for teaching key mathematical concepts most effectively. Useful target-setting practice is emerging but, outside the sixth form, the manner of helping pupils to reach these targets is not made sufficiently explicit or practical.

121. The management and administration of the department has remained satisfactory and group relationships are good. Internal communications are good, but the department's documentation is unhelpful in describing its functioning as a team. Leadership has been weaker in failing to establish a clear, shared vision for the subject or to concentrate on raising standards across Key Stages 3 and 4. Until recently there has been no formal monitoring and support for teaching improvement, except for the newly-qualified teacher. There are clear signs of recent improvement in the way the department is reviewing its strengths and weaknesses and planning to address the latter. The department's improvement planning links well with whole-school initiatives but lacks precision and fails to identify the necessary actions to achieve intermediate goals.

122. Staff are well qualified but need help in improving their subject teaching effectiveness outside the sixth form. Accommodation is good with good efforts being made to create some lively mathematical environments. Resources are adequate apart from the frustration of limited access to ICT.

Science

123. Standards in science have continued to rise, throughout the school, since the last inspection. Key Stage 3 results are in line with the national average, whilst those for GCSE Double Science Award are above it. The percentage of pupils gaining the very highest grades (A* and A) in science GCSE examinations is impressive and is well above national figures. Whilst girls are outperforming boys in the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3, there is little difference between the performance of boys and girls by the end of Key Stage 4. Standards continue to be highest in upper ability groups. There is under-achievement in middle- to lower-ability groups, in which pupils tend to gain higher grades in other subjects than they do in science. Sixth form pupils consistently achieve high grades in A level chemistry and physics examinations, but are less successful in biology.

124. The majority of pupils, including those with SEN, are making at least steady progress in science, and are responding well to the challenges of the subject. In Key Stage 3 classes, pupils spend most of their time on task; they are starting to demonstrate appropriate practical skills and are generally working at a good pace. Progress in written work, particularly for the middle- and lower-ability groups, is more varied; opportunities for extended pieces of writing to demonstrate understanding and application are limited by the nature and scope of the worksheets in use. These frequently require only simple word insertion or sentence completion. In Key Stage 4, the progress of higher attaining pupils is good: pupils are developing the skills to undertake science investigations; they are interpreting data and formulating hypotheses, and are on task for the majority of time, participating in both questioning and discussion sessions. Progress for pupils in some middle- and lower-ability groups is less secure. Learning objectives and expectations are frequently not sufficiently matched to the ability of the groups. In these cases this leads to unsatisfactory and often incomplete pieces of work, and gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. Sixth form pupils, studying A level courses in biology, chemistry and physics, are making mainly good progress and have a mature approach to their studies. Some pupils, however, find the work difficult and have inappropriately chosen to study the course in the absence of any other courses being available within the department.

125. Across all year groups the attitude and behaviour of pupils to their work is generally at least satisfactory and is frequently good or very good. Practical work is undertaken safely and

sensibly and pupils work well together and with their teachers. Pupils generally listen well but, in some groups, mainly of middle- and lower-ability pupils, become restless when expected to listen for long periods of time. In other groups, pupils prefer to remain passive, contributing little to the development of the lesson. Sixth form pupils have a good range of study skills and are developing their capacity for personal study.

126. The department has addressed many of the issues raised in the last inspection report, but some issues concerning teaching remain. Teaching is variable across all key stages. It is particularly good for higher-attaining pupils, for whom teachers have high expectations, set appropriate challenges and work is regularly and consistently marked against a standard. Key Stage 3 classes receive mainly good or very good teaching. Teachers use a range of questioning skills effectively in order to challenge pupils, and to ensure that the lessons have a variety of activities that engage the pupils' interest and maintain pace. At Key Stage 4 teaching is more variable. Good teaching takes place mainly with higher ability groups, where pupils respond well to the more formal teaching approach adopted. In the weaker lessons, planning is weak and the same formal methods are less appropriate. Teaching of A level courses is rigorous and is generally good.

127. Management of the department, on a day-to-day basis, is sound, but leadership, strategic direction and development planning are weak. The curriculum provided meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. The departmental development plan, whilst reviewed annually, does not focus on the key issues identified for improving the performance of middle- and lower-attaining pupils. The department does not make explicit an ethos of continuous improvement for pupils - a determination to improve on previous best. As yet, any monitoring across the department to ensure consistency, particularly in lesson planning, teaching and marking, is very limited. The setting of individual pupil targets for improvement is at an early stage of development. Schemes of work are currently under revision and, when completed, should assist teachers in planning lessons that have differentiated learning outcomes based on an improved assessment of pupil progress through the course. The department has addressed issues of ICT, which is now included in the schemes of work. Provision for ICT is, however, inadequate and is largely reliant on outdated computers. Resources for practical work in science are barely sufficient and much is old.

128. Pupils benefit from the provision of sufficient laboratories to enable teaching to take place

in a laboratory for most lessons. Several laboratories have, however, been rendered inadequate due to broken sinks, blocked waste units and broken services, making any practical work difficult and, in some cases, dangerous. Ventilation in the chemistry and biology preparation rooms is poor and is potentially hazardous.

OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

Design and Technology

129. Overall, standards in the department are in line with national expectations in Key Stage 3, 4 and in the sixth form. Considerable progress has been made in Key Stage 3 since the previous inspection and most pupils are now on target to reach the national expectation by the end of Year 9. Teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 show a higher proportion of pupils achieving the expected level than is the case nationally. The proportion of higher (A*-C) D&T GCSE grades in 1999 was significantly higher than the national average, with excellent achievements in D&T systems and control, and good results in graphics and resistant materials. Home economics (HE) food and textile results were very good, and in child development the grades gained represent good achievement for the ability of the pupils taking the course. Since the previous inspection GNVQ foundation courses in health and social care and manufacturing have been introduced for low-ability pupils at Key Stage 4, and in both areas all pupils gained unit accreditation in 1999.

130. There were no entries at A level D&T in 1999. The present cohort of A level pupils is making sound progress, showing good knowledge of materials and properties and selecting and using a wide range of equipment. They are able to produce accurate working drawings and show appreciation of the needs of the consumer. In both A level and advanced GNVQ health and social care pupils work independently and speak with confidence about their studies.

131. In Key Stage 3 the majority of pupils, including those with SEN, make sound progress, and they now have the opportunity to work with electronics, control and plastics, experiences which were absent at the time of the last inspection. Pupils acquire knowledge and skills appropriate to the individual material area and learn to use the appropriate tools and equipment.

132. At Key Stage 4 the majority of pupils make sound to good progress in their GCSE courses. This represents an improvement on the situation at the time of the last inspection when work in textiles was unsatisfactory and resistant-materials work was variable. Designing skills in

relation to function are satisfactory and pupils in all material areas use their knowledge from research to develop realistic design specifications. Pupils use tools with confidence. In GCSE coursework throughout the department pupils with SEN are well supported by teachers and, as a result, they make sound progress. Progress is sound in GNVQ foundation health and social care but unsatisfactory in GNVQ foundation manufacturing, where pupils need constant supervision to work safely and struggle to relate their practical work to performance criteria. Pupils with SEN do not always make satisfactory progress in the GNVQ manufacturing course because they do not receive enough support.

133. Across all key stages pupils' attitude to learning are positive and there are good relationships between teachers and pupils. With the exception of the GNVQ manufacturing group, pupils work with appropriate attention to health and safety.

134. The majority of teaching is sound to good. Classroom management is effective and there is good individual support for pupils. The majority of lessons have clear objectives which are communicated to pupils and broken down into manageable targets. Assessment is used well to set targets in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. As observed during the last inspection, there continues to be too little teaching through the use of ICT, and there is still inadequate technical classroom support.

135. The Key Stage 3 curriculum consists of a series of short units of work which classes tackle in rotation. As at the previous inspection, this is not mapped or monitored sufficiently to check the coverage of National Curriculum programmes of study and to assess accurately pupils' progress in designing and making. The assessment and recording systems for Key Stage 4 and the sixth form continue to be effective in promoting improvement. The department has established good industrial links and operates an active Young Engineer's club.

136. The head of department is responsible for overall co-ordination of D&T and has been active in considering strategies to aid progression from the middle schools. Extensive development has taken place on establishing a common system of assessment for Key Stage 3, but the system over-assesses and does not yet aid pupils' progression. At present the department does not have a shared vision of D&T.

137. The accommodation for teaching D&T continues to militate against a holistic approach to

teaching and sharing of resources and ideas, as the rooms are still widely dispersed. The resistant-materials area continues to be dirty and storage remains a problem, though efforts have been made to improve the display. The department has not planned to update equipment as part of a rolling programme. Food rooms are old and well maintained but inappropriate for the demands of modern D&T. As highlighted in the previous report, teaching staff continue to spend too much time on non-teaching activities to ensure their rooms are sufficiently prepared for pupils to engage in appropriate activities. A programme of work for the resistant-materials technician should ensure work is prioritised effectively.

Information Technology

138. The previous inspection of the school classified information technology (IT) as a key issue for improvement. Some of the areas identified, such as the need to improve IT provision for pupils with SEN, have been addressed. However, there remain a number of significant shortcomings, some of which were identified by parents in their comments on the school. Principal among these is the failure to ensure that pupils within Key Stage 4 and the sixth form have the opportunity to utilise and develop their IT skills.

139. IT is taught as a discrete course in Key Stage 3 and as an A level course in computing in the sixth form. Pupils are achieving sound standards at Key Stage 3, and teacher assessments at the end of the key stage show that the proportion of pupils reaching the nationally expected level is in line with the national average. On the A level course, standards are high and results good - over the past years, all pupils entered for the examination have passed, eighty per cent of them at the highest grades. The quality of teaching is satisfactory or better in ninety percent of lessons, and good in over a third. Lessons are well prepared, supported by carefully produced resource materials and delivered effectively by a balanced combination of teacher input and practical activity. Pupils respond positively during these lessons and make generally sound progress at Key Stage 3, and rapid progress on the A level course. Pupils with SEN make good progress with their IT skills in Key Stage 3, and the use of IT promotes their learning.

140. At Key Stage 4 however, progress is poor and standards below the national expectation. The curriculum for IT at this stage does not comply with statutory requirements. Individual departments, including English, geography and GNVQ, are making effective use of IT. However, there is no coherent co-ordination of this cross-curricular use, and it is evident that older pupils are

not presented with the opportunity to develop a breadth of IT skills, nor to utilise their existing skills fully. There is no effective system in place to monitor or evaluate the use of IT across departments.

141. A significant contributory factor to this state of affairs is the lack of access to appropriate computers. There are two major concentrations of ageing Archimedes computers which are connected to the school network. Considerable effort and skill have gone into ensuring the continued operation of these computers. However, the delivery of the Key Stage 3 timetabled course occupies these machines for the majority of the time. There are small concentrations of modern PC computers around the school, with those connected to the Internet within the library providing a particularly useful resource. However, these distributed computers are not yet in sufficient numbers to make a significant contribution to the widespread delivery of an IT entitlement for all. The need for further training to develop staff expertise also remains an issue.

142. The school is aware of the extent of these shortcomings and has developed a three-stage strategy to rectify the situation, based upon the development of resources, staff training and coherent delivery. The initial stage of the first phase is already under way. It is vital that this plan be implemented in full if staff are to be provided with the means of ensuring that pupils receive their statutory IT entitlement, and if pupils are to have access to appropriate resources.

History

143. At A Level standards of attainment are well above the national average. In 1998 examinations results were in line with the national average and in 1999 they were well above it. Standards in the current Years 12 and 13 are above national expectations. Year 13 pupils are producing very good coursework assignments on issues such as Hitler and the final solution. These standards are the result of teaching which is well focused on historical explanation and on examination requirements.

144. In recent years, standards of attainment at GCSE have been around the national average - just above it in 1998, and just below it in 1999. In the current Year 10 standards are in line with national expectations and in Year 11 they are above those expectations.

145. In the national tests at the end of Key Stage 3, the proportion of pupils achieving the

nationally expected level is in line with the national average. Pupils' attainment is best developed in terms of their knowledge and understanding and in their historical enquiry skills. Their ability to interpret the past is not so well developed.

146. At A level all pupils are making at least good progress and for many it is very good. Year 13 pupils are making good progress in their ability to see the complexity of historical situations such as the many differing viewpoints on Cromwell by his contemporaries. At Key Stage 4 the vast majority of pupils, including pupils with SEN, are making good progress. Year 11 pupils at all levels of attainment are making good progress in increasing their depth of understanding of the tactics used by the Revolutionary government of the USSR to increase worker motivation and economic production. At Key Stage 3 the majority of pupils at all levels of attainment are making satisfactory progress, including pupils with SEN. Progress is most developed in relation to knowledge of the key features of events and developments such as the impact of urbanisation on living conditions. Pupils' source-handling skills are developing well, but they are making little progress in their understanding of interpretations of the past.

147. Pupils' attitudes to learning are satisfactory in Key Stage 3, good in Key Stage 4 and very good in the sixth form. Behaviour is very good; pupils work well together and their concentration levels are high. Many pupils in all groups are keen to respond to teacher questioning and to offer comments.

148. Teaching is good at A Level and GCSE and at least satisfactory in Key Stage 3, an improvement on the situation at the time of the last inspection. Strong features of the teaching are good subject knowledge, good relationships with pupils, and good use of probing questioning to extend pupils' understanding. For example, in a Year 10 lesson the teacher set up an excellent decision-making activity around the negotiation of the Treaty of Versailles. The pupils were well prepared on the historical context and this, together with skilful questioning by the teacher, enabled them to reach a sophisticated understanding of attitudes at the time. At the same time, great care was taken to ensure that the pupils had an accurate record of what actually happened. Good use is made of homework and careful marking to support the pupils' learning in lessons.

149. The department has made sound progress in developing the use of site work and of ICT. The department is well managed, but documentation is weak and currently does not provide

sufficient support to raise standards still higher at Key Stage 3 and GCSE. The history curriculum complies with the requirements of the National Curriculum.

Geography

150. Pupils' performance in both GCSE and A Level examinations has improved significantly since the last inspection. In 1999, in both examinations, the proportion of candidates achieving the highest grades was well above national averages. The department has worked hard to ensure success in public examinations and the strategies pursued have been successful, particularly at A Level where the majority of pupils achieve the highest grades. In lessons and work samples, attainment is at least in line with national expectations at Key Stage 4 and A Level. The proportion of pupils who are achieving the nationally expected level at the end of Key Stage 3 is above the national average, but a minority of middle ability pupils underachieve, an issue identified at the last inspection. Attainment in geography is largely secure in terms of the knowledge and understanding of physical and human processes, in the study of places and in the organisation of map skills, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

151. Progress in both key stages and at A level is at least satisfactory for the great majority of pupils, and for many it is good. It is strongest at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, where it is promoted by the pace of the public examination courses. The progress of pupils with SEN, especially those with behavioural difficulties, is sometimes hindered by the lack of support. While there is no overall difference in the progress of boys and girls, the lack of concentration of boys in some sets leads to restlessness which inhibits their progress.

152. Pupils make satisfactory progress in the development of map skills and in knowledge and understanding of environmental issues. In Key Stage 4, pupils engage in building up case studies of both less- and more-economically-developed countries, which lead to an understanding of what is meant by 'development'. In the sixth form, progress is always at least satisfactory and is often very good in aspects of both physical and human geography. The majority of pupils respond well to lessons. They show interest in the subject, listen attentively, are keen to answer questions, and concentrate on the tasks set. In some instances they work collaboratively, sharing information and ideas. A minority of pupils sometimes find it difficult to sustain concentration or respond positively to the activities set. There is little evidence, particularly in Key Stages 3 and 4, of pupils taking responsibility for their own learning.

153. Almost all teaching is at least sound and much is good and very good. Teachers have secure subject knowledge, lessons are well prepared and in most lessons relationships between teachers and pupils are good. Where the quality of teaching was notably good, teachers set high expectations of work and behaviour, pace was appropriate and pupils' thinking was challenged. Some lessons, however, suffered from loosely-defined learning objectives, an insufficient variety of teaching approaches and a lack of pace. Management of behaviour was not always effective in these lessons.

154. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. Most aspects of National Curriculum geography are met, though ICT has yet to be fully developed and integrated into schemes of work, an issue identified by the last inspection. Some progress has been made, but the head of department is fully aware of the need for more. Fieldwork is also not yet fully integrated into the curriculum and opportunities for such work are missed in both physical and human geography, mostly at Key Stage 3.

155. There are schemes of work for all key stages, which provide continuity and progression. Learning outcomes are, however, not always clearly defined and require further development. The department does not have specific policies on literacy and numeracy but examples of good practice were observed throughout the subject. There was good use of text and a variety of writing modes to suit lesson objectives. Speaking and listening skills are encouraged. Numeracy skills included the development of graphicacy in Year 8 and the interpretation and analysis of data. The department makes a good contribution to the moral, social and cultural development of pupils.

156. Arrangements for assessment are systematic. Marking is regular though not all teachers make it clear to pupils how they can improve their work. There is scope for further use of assessment data to identify different patterns of performance between boys and girls.

157. The department has a positive ethos, a good learning environment and good relationships. The work of the effective and experienced teaching team is well-managed, but leadership for improvement needs development. Clear aims and policies for the subject and sharing good practice based on observation of each other teaching, led by the head of department, would create a stronger culture of improvement.

Modern Foreign Languages

158. Standards of attainment in modern foreign languages (French and German) are low in relation to other areas of the school's work, and results at GCSE have been almost always "below the line" compared with other subjects. Girls perform much better than boys at GCSE, ten girls gaining A*-C grades for every six boys. This gender gap begins early in the school, with girls substantially outnumbering boys in the top sets. Although one third of the entry takes two foreign languages in Key Stage 3, only a handful elects to continue both at Key Stage 4.

159. These weaknesses appear early on. Pupils enter the school with two years' French behind them. Their listening skills are good and, on occasion, a good oral response was seen. Less talented groups are more inclined to lose interest quickly and to need constant prodding. By the end of Key Stage 3, the proportion achieving the nationally expected level is about average.

160. In Key Stage 4, work in top sets is well geared towards GCSE and results among these groups are generally good. Pupils who are at the margin between C and D grades tend to get the lower result. Only small numbers proceed to A level. The work done at GCSE has done little to prepare them for the rigours of A level, and much time has to be spent on codifying basic grammatical points. Nevertheless, good results have been achieved. At all stages, progress is good where teachers use the target language, maintain pace and have high expectations of pupils. Where pupils are allowed to sit back and dictate the pace themselves, and where the foreign language is not used as a main means of communication in the classroom, progress is poor, particularly among lower-attaining groups. Pupils' attitudes towards modern foreign languages are generally satisfactory, although any enthusiasm shown is muted. In some lower-attaining groups there is often boisterousness, off-task chatter and occasional insolence. Pupils with SEN do not make rapid progress, and few choose to study a language in Key Stage 4.

161. The quality of teaching overall is satisfactory with forty per cent which is good and ten per cent which is sub-standard. In the good practice seen, teachers were well prepared, used the foreign language consistently and well, and had high expectations of pupils. In less satisfactory lessons teachers were forced into defensive teaching, setting low-level tasks to contain rather than enthuse pupils. The curriculum is generally satisfactory and meets the requirements of the National Curriculum, although numbers opting to keep up their two languages are low, and the short courses on offer at Key Stage 4 provide an unsatisfactory diet. Particularly in French,

continuity in the subject is inhibited by resources which do not link well from one year to the next.

162. The work of the department has not improved since the last inspection; aspects of attainment in examinations described as good in that report are now at best sound and below the level of other departments in the school. Departmental leadership is poor; teachers of languages are insufficiently supported by observation of their work and by the scanty departmental documentation. A major factor in the poor performance of the department at large is the unhappiness and professional mistrust which exist between the headteacher and the head of department and between the head of department and other teachers. This poor climate in the department overshadows its work and it is imperative that a fresh management approach be found if modern languages are to play an appropriate role in the life and improvement of the school.

Art

163. Teachers' assessments of pupils' work at the end of Key Stage 3 shows that the majority of pupils are achieving the nationally expected standard. Recent years' GCSE art results have been slightly below both the national average and pupils' results in the other subjects they take. There was an improvement in 1999. The general level of art examination results in the sixth form has been modest, but the number of A Level and GNVQ art pupils has been too small for reliable national comparison.

164. From evidence gathered during the inspection, attainment in Key Stage 3 is mostly in line with or above expectations, while in Key Stage 4 attainment ranges from in line with expectations to well above them. The majority of the higher attainment seen in Key Stage 4 relates to work in Year 10. Half of the attainment seen in Years 12 and 13 is above expectations, with the rest in line with or below about equally.

165. Pupils are able to develop good levels of practical skills in a range of two- and three-dimensional materials and processes. Year 8 pupils' colour control is good, with some beginning to understand how colour can be used expressively, for example in a portraiture project inspired by expressionist ideas. The use of colour continues to develop in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, where it is a good feature of imagery in paint, print and three-dimensional work. In Key Stage 4 and the sixth form a developing strength is researching and experimenting to generate a range of design ideas and individual responses within the projects set. This is particularly seen in Year 10,

growing from a visit to Worcester Cathedral. This project has provided Year 10 pupils with a powerful beginning to their GCSE course.

166. While there are some individual examples of good observational drawing in all years, for example some of the Year 9 figure drawings, this aspect of attainment is not strong because it is not developed systematically. Underdeveloped observational drawing skills reduce the quality of imagery in some Key Stage 4 and sixth form work. In all key stages there are many examples of pupils' work inspired by other artists and other cultures. In spite of this, the level of knowledge and understanding about art, and pupils' ability to discuss art issues and ideas, is weak in Key Stage 3, better in Key Stage 4 and better again in the sixth form.

167. Almost all pupils in Key Stage 3 make at least satisfactory progress in the development of practical skills. Pupils with SEN make progress at least as good progress as other pupils. Able pupils are less well catered for in a minority of lessons where the work set provides them with little beyond the practical level. Some of the work set in Key Stage 3 gives these pupils little opportunity to develop their thinking, lift ideas, or develop individual creativity.

168. Year 10 pupils have made rapid progress, adjusting well to the demands of GCSE coursework. Progress in Year 11 is less dynamic because some pupils have found the lengthy development of coursework hard, but is nonetheless sound. Underdeveloped drawing skill hampers some of the image making. Most pupils seen following the GNVQ foundation course are making good progress, but the progress of a significant number on this course is poor because of low attendance.

169. In Year 12 both GNVQ and A Level pupils have made good progress, rapidly transferring to the higher expectations of sixth form courses. Year 13 folders show development of ideas and practical skills, and increased knowledge and understandings about art.

170. In all key stages, pupils' response in art lessons is overwhelmingly good. Pupils are pleasant and co-operative, listen well and are attentive to demonstrations and advice. They work hard, answer questions confidently, and value the teaching support they receive. This applies even in some Key Stage 3 lessons where the work set contains little to excite their enthusiasm. Pupils are increasingly able to develop their own responses and ideas. In the sixth form the majority of pupils

are self-motivated, able to make their own informed choices and plan their own developments.

171. Through the way it encourages pupils to reflect on fine art and take part in cultural visits, the department makes a substantial contribution to pupils' spiritual and cultural development.

172. Most Key Stage 3 teaching is satisfactory, with some which is very good and one lesson which was unsatisfactory. Most Key Stage 4 teaching is good or very good, with nothing less than satisfactory teaching seen. In the sixth form teaching is equally satisfactory or good. Teaching in Key Stage 3 is carefully detailed with emphasis mostly on the practical side. All lessons are organised with appropriate materials and equipment to hand. Pupils' behaviour is well managed. Some of the Key Stage 3 tasks set are inappropriate or too dominated by the teacher, resulting in standardised rather than individually-expressive outcomes, with little to inspire creative thinking. Some homework is set without enough guidance to enable pupils to understand what needs to be done. In contrast, other teaching seen in Key Stage 3 develops not only practical skills but creative and expressive experience as well, and provides an arena for ideas and understandings about the nature and purpose of art.

173. There is some good individually-tailored teaching, beginning in Key Stage 3 and becoming a major feature in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. This contains plenty of evaluative, formative support to help pupils at all levels of attainment. Teachers have good specialist expertise which is communicated in some powerfully presented demonstrations.

174. Weaker aspects of teaching are questioning techniques to generate more developed responses, and some of the Key Stage 3 planning which results in some undemanding work and some poor progression in key skills like observational drawing.

175. Organisation and management of the department are good. Leadership to create a good staff team, including inducting a new teacher, is also good. Monitoring of the curriculum and of teaching is undeveloped, as the lack of continuity in the scheme of work and the variation in teaching quality show. All aspects of the National Curriculum in art are provided, including some opportunities to use computers. The opportunities provided for reflection on great art, and the work with art from a variety of cultures, means that the department makes a sound contribution to pupils' spiritual and cultural development. Studios are well organised.

176. Since the 1995 inspection there has been a slight drop in attainment in Key Stage 3, while that in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form has been maintained. Underachievement because of inappropriate tasks set is still found. Planning of the Key Stage 3 scheme of work has improved but consistency of quality and delivery of the plan needs further attention.

Music

177. The specialist music teachers were absent due to illness for much of the inspection; judgements are therefore based on scrutiny of pupils' work, both in files and recorded; the observation of a little teaching and some practices and instrumental lessons; departmental documents and records; and discussions with staff and pupils.

178. At the end of Key Stage 3, over half of pupils reach or exceed the standards expected nationally. Most pupils understand basic theory and can use musical terms appropriately. They play simple keyboard parts confidently although, when playing together, they do not always listen carefully enough to create a good group performance. Some pupils produce good compositions using sophisticated sequencing keyboards. Pupils' singing is usually accurate but it is too tentative and lacks expression. Written responses to music are often simple, although some pupils show more perceptive listening and are able to relate technique to effect.

179. Results at GCSE are well above the national average although numbers opting for the subject fluctuate widely. Compositions by recent pupils range from sound to good, some displaying imaginative use of resources and subtle use of chords. At A level, the small number taking the examination recently have achieved middle to high grades. Current pupils show competent composing skills and satisfactory understanding of musical history. Aural skills are sometimes insecure. At both Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, pupils use available technology well to support their composing although the lack of computers restricts this.

180. Standards of performance in extra-curricular work are good. The CD produced last year includes ensembles and pupils' compositions of high quality and reflects the enthusiasm within the department. The number of pupils receiving instrumental tuition is lower than average, but the recent introduction of tuition for younger children in the area is a positive initiative to build numbers for the future. This is further tribute to the enthusiasm and commitment of the

department.

181. Whilst most pupils respond well to the teaching and make satisfactory progress in lessons, progress across the school is variable. In the sixth form it is satisfactory and in Key Stage 4 often good. It is more limited in Key Stage 3, including for pupils with SEN, where it is hampered by a lack of curriculum co-ordination with the partner middle schools and very limited diagnostic activities at the start of Year 8. The teaching therefore cannot build upon the varied musical experiences and skills which the pupils bring with them. The problem was identified in the last inspection and continues to be a pressing need if standards at Key Stage 3 are to rise.

182. Pupils' behaviour is good in class and they apply themselves well to the work they are given. Some use the department at breaks and lunchtime to practise and pursue their own work. Pupils sometimes receive too much direct instruction in lessons and then do not have enough chance to work together, show initiative and explore challenges in their own ways.

183. In the absence of the specialist music teachers for much of the inspection, it is not possible to make a secure judgement of teaching overall, although that which was seen was satisfactory. Amongst its strengths are the good relationships between staff and pupils which motivates them to work and behave well, and the careful use of language to match pupils' abilities. Pupils' work is marked and assessed very carefully. The teaching is sometimes less effective than it should be, however, because there are too few opportunities for pupils to reinforce and apply their learning, for example by relating a recording of a song to their own performance or discussing the work they have done.

184. The curriculum outline shows that the range of experience required by the National Curriculum is provided but short-term planning is unsatisfactory. There is insufficient detail to show how teachers should organise the work, the learning intentions for each lesson, how these will be achieved, how pupils of differing abilities will be challenged, how the activities of the curriculum should be interlinked within lessons and what homework will be set.

185. The department's good reputation within the school and the community is deserved, and music makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, social and cultural development. The department is led enthusiastically and efficiently but the teaching and the standards that pupils

achieve in class are not yet monitored sufficiently systematically or frequently to raise standards further. There continues to be a shortage of computers and an absence of good percussion to offer more varied opportunities for the pupils' learning and music making; other resources are appropriate and up-to-date.

Physical Education

186. In 1999 GCSE results at the higher grades were well above the national averages for both boys and girls, with a significant proportion of A* and A grades. At A level, results were outstanding with over half the pupils attaining A or B grades. In recent years, examination results have been consistently good, with pupils tending to achieve better standards in PE than in their other subjects. Teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 show that the majority of pupils are attaining average standards.

187. Inspection evidence shows that, by the end of Key Stage 3, both boys and girls attain average standards. Pupils show satisfactory levels of skill in a number of activities, have an understanding of the basic rules and tactics in games, and apply them to their own performance. In gymnastics, pupils can select from a range of movements to create their own sequences, as they did in Year 8 when working on transferring weight between different parts of the body. They prepare carefully for activity at the start of lessons and have a good understanding of safety issues in PE. Throughout the key stage pupils have good skills of observation and evaluation; they observe the work of others accurately and comment on what is needed for improvement.

188. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is good. Pupils taking GCSE courses show good knowledge and understanding of a range of topics. Their folders are well organised and show good standards of literacy and numeracy; some use is made of IT, but there is scope for more. In practical work pupils have extended their range of skills through the option programme; many play games with confidence and undertake a variety of roles such as those of official and coach. Many can comment in detail on the performance of others, but they do not apply the same evaluative process to their own work and so identify their own areas of strength and weakness. They continue to prepare carefully for each activity and often lead the activity for others in their group, but do not always link the work they are doing to that on general fitness and adopting a healthy lifestyle. Group work throughout the school is a strength; pupils work well together, co-operating and supporting each other when they are learning skills and compete fairly when playing

in teams.

189. Attainment in the sixth form is good both in A level courses and the Community Sports Leader Award. Discussions with pupils and scrutiny of their folders of work show a good understanding of a wide range of themes important in PE.

190. Throughout the school, extra-curricular activities are well supported by many pupils. The standards achieved in these activities are good, with a significant number of pupils going on to represent local and regional teams.

191. Pupils make good progress in PE throughout the school as shown in lessons, discussions and examination of work. Pupils enter the school with a range of skills and experiences and, by the end of Key Stage 3, the majority attain the national expectation and some attain standards above it. Progress throughout Key Stage 4 quickens and by the end of the key stage a significant proportion of pupils attain standards above the national expectation, particularly in examination classes and extra-curricular activities. Sixth-form pupils make good progress and the good examination results in Key Stage 4 are built on to produce outstanding results at A level. In lessons throughout the school progress is good, the result of good teaching building on the good attitudes and behaviour of pupils. In a Year 10 netball lesson the teacher skilfully used the prior knowledge of one group of pupils to have them coach a second group of less experienced but well-motivated pupils; as a result all made good progress. Pupils of all abilities, including those with SEN, make equally good progress.

192. Pupils' response to physical education is good. Participation rates are high and pupils behave well in lessons as they respond to the high expectations of the teachers. Pupils are generally well motivated but a small minority of older pupils were passive in some lessons. Pupils have a well-developed sense of fair play which is fostered through work in lessons. That PE is well regarded by pupils is shown in the increasing numbers choosing physical education as an examination subject.

193. The quality of teaching throughout the school is good, with little difference between the key stages. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and a keen interest in teaching their subject in both the core curriculum and the examination courses. They plan series of well-constructed

practices which help pupils develop skills progressively, and skilfully link the learning of skills to the rules and conditions of the games being taught. Lessons are well organised and run efficiently. In the best lessons teachers make well-judged interventions to help pupils progress but also allow them time to learn for themselves. In otherwise satisfactory lessons this brisk pace was not evident, explanations were too long or pupils given too much information. When this lack of pace was combined with a more passive response from the pupils the progress made was modest. Teachers make clear evaluations to the class and this helps increase the rate of progress. Comments to individual pupils are supportive but do not always focus in the same way on what pupils can do to improve for themselves. Homework is set for examination classes as required.

194. Leadership is good and the department is very efficiently managed. Resources are well organised, as is the excellent programme of clubs and visits. Morale is high, staff work well together and are committed to high standards and to involving pupils in the subject; they give generously of their time to extra-curricular activities. Teaching is carefully monitored and a good level of informal interchange on teaching adds strength to the more formal monitoring. Through its emphasis on working together, health and fair play, PE makes a good contribution to pupils' moral and social development and the ethos of the school. Accommodation and resources are satisfactory overall.

195. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. New schemes of work and assessment have been put in place and the overall standard of teaching has improved. Successful action has been taken to deal with the key issue relating to the Key Stage 3 curriculum and links with the middle school raised in the 1995 report. The curriculum now fully meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. The award of Sports College status to the school in the week following the inspection is a fitting tribute to the work of the school as a whole, and especially to the PE department.

Religious Education

196. In Key Stage 3, pupils' attainment is average and in line with the expectations of the Worcestershire Agreed Syllabus. Most pupils, including those with SEN, display sound knowledge about the religions they are studying, but have less secure understanding of the deeper beliefs and concepts behind those religions. When given appropriate opportunities, many pupils can articulate their own questions and beliefs in light of their work. In the GCSE short course, for all pupils in

Key Stage 4, attainment is well above the national average with eighty five per cent achieving A*-C grades in 1999. This continued the improvement since the introduction of the course in 1997. In the GCSE full course, pupils' attained results that were approximately a grade higher than for the other subjects they took, but slightly below the national average. Attainment in the current option groups in Years 10 and 11 is average. Although no candidates were entered for A level in 1999, results from 1997 and 1998 indicated a steady rise, with the eleven candidates in 1998 achieving well above the national average, and with forty five per cent achieving A and B grades compared to the national average of thirty per cent. Attainment in the current A level groups is average for some pupils and above for others.

197. In Key Stage 3, progress is mostly satisfactory but occasionally unsatisfactory. On the whole, pupils' knowledge about religion progresses faster than their ability to think about deeper issues and draw reasoned conclusions. In response to teacher-led discussion, some pupils can weigh issues and raise thoughtful questions, but much more careful consideration should be given to finding more active and engaging ways of helping all pupils to learn in RE. When progress is unsatisfactory it is because activities are not appropriately matched to the needs and abilities of the pupils. Pupils make good progress when they are set imaginative and clearly structured tasks which require them to use a range of skills. For example, pupils in Year 9, producing an obituary of Martin Luther King, worked well at investigating a range of sources, applying earlier learning, analysing key achievements and presenting ideas and information. In Key Stage 4, progress in both GCSE full and short courses is satisfactory but could again be improved with the development of a wider variety of challenging classroom activities. A level pupils are making satisfactory and sometimes good progress. Where progress is good, challenging questions are posed and explored through skilful discussion and stimulated by carefully chosen resources and a range of teaching strategies.

198. In Key Stage 3 most pupils have a positive attitude to their work in RE and are keen to take an active part in the lessons. Most concentrate and listen well with many contributing in discussion. Sensitivity towards the beliefs and values of others is particularly evident with lower ability sets. A classroom display of Christian and Hindu artefacts is treated with respect, whilst pupils studying Hindu worship showed appreciation of the beauty of the shrine and asked thoughtful questions. Pupil response in Key Stage 4 is mixed. The introduction of the short course has motivated most pupils, but a small minority shows little interest and are easily distracted. A

level pupils work well independently and take responsibility for their learning.

199. Teaching is mostly satisfactory and is sometimes good or very good. Teachers are all well qualified and their subject knowledge and enthusiasm is a strength of the department. Expectations are, however, sometimes insufficiently high with too much dependence on teacher-led, whole-class lessons, requiring pupils only to record information in a variety of ways. More focus is needed on clear and achievable learning objectives, particularly in relation to enabling pupils to explore deeper questions of meaning and purpose – a key strand of the Agreed Syllabus. There is over-dependence on worksheets and photocopied materials in most lessons. There are inadequate textbook and other resources for Key Stage 3 with little progress made on this since the last inspection.

200. By giving pupils the opportunity to reflect on higher things and to value different belief systems, the department's work makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development.

201. RE is well organised and managed during the inter-regnum while the school seeks to recruit a new head of department. Teaching is supported by a detailed scheme of work which meets Agreed Syllabus requirements. Assessment procedures are well organised. Further development is needed to identify clearly what pupils should know, understand and be able to do as a result of their learning; strategies to ensure all pupils learn effectively and build on earlier learning; and to take account of amendments arising from the revision of the Agreed Syllabus. Materials to support a range of individual needs have not been sufficiently developed since the last inspection. The school provides good accommodation for RE with a good learning environment enhanced by attractive displays of pupils' work. The timetabled RE time for pupils taking three science subjects in Year 10 is unsatisfactory and fails to meet the requirements of the Locally Agreed Syllabus. The failure to provide RE in the sixth form - an issue from the last inspection is in breach of statutory requirements

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

202. The school was inspected over a period of five days by a team of seventeen inspectors who together spent fifty-four days collecting evidence in the school. The evidence leading to the team's judgements comprised the following.

203. The observation of:

- two hundred and fifty seven lessons/part lessons; all members of staff present during the inspection period were seen teaching at least once, and most on several occasions;
- twenty-five registrations and tutor periods;
five assemblies;
ten formal meetings of staff and pupil committees and groups;
a range of lunchtime, before- and after-school activities.

204. Interviews/structured discussions with:

- over forty pupils, in addition to a large number of brief discussions with them during lessons and around the site;
thirty-five members of the teaching staff;
ten members of the non-teaching staff;
eight members of the governing body;
the education welfare officer;
senior officers of the local education authority (LEA);
representatives of the community, including headteachers of partner schools, county and district councillors, members of the business community and members of the youth and welfare services;
forty parents, at a meeting held by the registered inspector in advance of the inspection.

205. The scrutiny of:

- the work of a large sample of pupils of all ages and abilities, in addition to the large amount of the work of all year groups seen during lessons;
four hundred and seven questionnaires returned by parents, an analysis of which appears at the end of this report;

fifty-five letters from parents to the registered inspector;

well-organised documentation provided by the school about every aspect of its life and work.

206. DATA AND INDICATORS

Pupil data

	Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of pupils with statements of SEN	Number of pupils on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals
Y8 - Y13	1419	21	214	166

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers (Y8 – Y13)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent)	84.7
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.8

Education support staff (Y8 – Y13)

Total number of education support staff	16
Total aggregate hours worked each week	446

Average class size: 23.9

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes: 75.6

Average teaching group size: KS3 25
KS4 23

Financial data

Financial year: 1998/99

	£
Total Income	3018642
Total Expenditure	3123689
Expenditure per pupil	2255

Balance brought forward from previous year	69475
Balance carried forward to next year	-35572

PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:	1419
Number of questionnaires returned:	407

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	11.5	62.7	17.4	7.4	1.0
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	22.9	61.1	9.6	5.9	0.5
The school handles complaints from parents well	9.4	50.3	30.7	8.6	1.0
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	11.4	58.8	16.4	12.4	1.0
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	14.5	59.4	14.3	10.5	1.3
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	21.7	66.1	8.5	3.2	0.5
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	24.6	55.5	14.5	4.7	0.7
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	13.0	68.4	8.8	8.1	1.7
The unit's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	15.4	55.1	24.8	4.5	0.2
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	12.5	51.9	26.9	7.2	1.5
My child(ren) like(s) school	19.1	62.5	12.3	4.7	1.5

Other issues raised by parents

Parents particularly praised:

the quality of education and care given to their children, and the attitudes which the school seeks to develop;

the standards their children are achieving and the progress they are making;

the care and support given to individuals, including those with difficulties;

the way the school encourages attendance, punctuality and behaviour;

firm discipline, including the school's honest approach to bullying, and the rapid response on the

occasions when it does happen.

They are less happy about:

provision for IT;

the timing of parents' evenings and reports in the year;

inconsistency in the speed and helpfulness of the response to their concerns from different members of staff.