

INSPECTION REPORT

West Kirby Grammar School for Girls
West Kirby

LEA area: Wirral

Unique Reference Number: 105099

Inspection Number: 184693

Headteacher: Mrs J Erskine

Reporting inspector: Mr E Wheatley
10013

Dates of inspection: 6th-10th December 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 707976

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar
Type of control:	Local authority
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Girls
School address:	Graham Road West Kirby Wirral CH48 5DP
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of Chair of Governors:	Mrs D Furniss
Date of previous inspection:	May 1995

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Mr L Robarts	English Drama	
Mr H Wilkie Mrs M Foulds Mr J Haslam	Mathematics Science Design and technology Information and communication technology	
Ms M Thompson	Modern foreign languages Russian Latin	Teaching The efficiency of the school
Mr J Townend Mrs V Grigg Mr D Rogers Mrs A Cawthera Mr J Challands	History Geography Art Music Physical education	Special educational needs
Mr R Wilkins Mrs A Bridger	Religious education Business studies	Staffing, accommodation and resources for learning Assessment Curriculum Key Stage 4 and the sixth form Equal opportunities

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MAIN FINDINGS

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- .The attainment of pupils is above average and for some pupils it is well above average. The progress made by pupils is good.
- .The Headteacher provides very clear direction for the raising of standards.
- .The ethos for learning is excellent.
- .The attitudes and behaviour of pupils is very good.
- .Relationships between pupils, and between pupils and teachers are very good.
- .The attendance of pupils is very good.
- .Teaching is good overall and never less than satisfactory. It is sometimes very good and occasionally excellent.
- .The curriculum in the sixth form is very good.
- .Careers work and preparation for the next stage of pupils' and students' education is very good.
- .Provision for social development is excellent and for moral provision is very good.
- .Parents' involvement in pupils' learning and the school's links with the community are very good.
- .The range of extracurricular activities is very good.
- .Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
- .The school gives very good value for money.

WHERE THE SCHOOL HAS WEAKNESSES

I.Religious education does not fully meet the requirements of the agreed syllabus at Key Stage 4 or in Years 12 and 13 because there is not enough time to cover the syllabus to sufficient depth.

II.Development planning does not systematically involve governors and staff in the processes of long and short-term planning that includes realistic costing and the means by which attainment of goals can be measured.

III.Arrangements for the professional development of teachers are unsatisfactory because the appraisal of teachers is not sufficiently frequent and evaluation of teaching does not consistently link training needs to development planning.

IV.Single lessons for history, modern foreign languages, physical education and science are frequently significantly shortened because pupils arrive late due to the distance between different teaching areas.

V.There is insufficient documented provision for spiritual development within the curriculum.

VI.Reports on pupils' progress do not provide sufficiently clear details about the knowledge, understanding and skills which pupils have gained.

VII.Statutory requirements for collective worship, the appraisal of teachers, special educational needs policy, and information on special educational needs provision in the governors' annual report, are not fully met.

VIII.Health and safety issues.

West Kirby Grammar School for Girls is a very good school. The strengths of the school far outweigh the weaknesses and in this context, the identified weaknesses are areas for further development to help this school maintain its high standards and refine the ways in which it works. The governors' action plan will set out how the weaknesses identified during the inspection are to be tackled. The plan will be sent to all parents or guardians of pupils at the school.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE THE LAST INSPECTION

Overall the school has made satisfactory progress in working on the key issues raised at the last inspection. There has been some effective sharing of classroom practice resulting in improved teaching although lack of systematic approaches to evaluating teaching has limited the extent of improvement. The targeting of in-service training has been satisfactory overall, and good in developing the roles of heads of departments. It has been less effective for teachers because the appraisal of some teachers has not been sufficiently frequent. The school has audited its resources effectively and the quality of resources have improved, including in the library. At departmental level, such auditing is still underdeveloped; it is not consistently linked to development as well as to replacement of resources. Good progress has been made in encouraging pupils to take greater responsibility for their own learning; independent learning, research and self-assessment are now well established. There has

been satisfactory development of the use of information technology across the curriculum, although systematic evaluation of provision in all subjects is not established. The school still does not fully comply with statutory requirements for collective worship by providing an act of daily worship for Years 12 and 13 students. The school is well positioned to continue its improvement.

STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS

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

Performance in:	Compared with all schools	Compared with similar schools	Key
			Well above average
			Above average
Key Stage 3	A*	C	Average
GCSE examinations	A*	A	Below average
A/AS levels	A	n/a	Well below average

Pupils enter the school with above average attainment overall, but very few pupils have the higher levels at Key Stage 2. During their time in Years 7, 8 and 9 the majority of pupils make good progress and reach levels much higher than expected in the end of Key Stage 3 tests in English, mathematics and science, with a significant proportion obtaining the highest levels in English. By the end of Year 11, when pupils take the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations, 51 per cent of results obtained were at A*/A grade. Ninety eight per cent of pupils obtained five or more A*-C grade GCSEs. In the sixth form, although the school has rigorous entry requirements to the courses leading to A level, the school interprets these generously, often taking in students who do not meet the stated requirements, and occasionally allowing students longer than the usual two year period to complete the course. Attainment is often high, with many pupils obtaining high grades; the great majority of students go on to higher education.

QUALITY OF TEACHING

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	Good	Very good teaching was seen in all subjects	No unsatisfactory teaching was seen during the inspection, although occasionally some teaching has a limited range of teaching styles
Years 10-11	Good		
Sixth form	Good		
English	Good		
Mathematics	Good		

All teaching is satisfactory or better. About 85 per cent is good or better and about 24 per cent is very good, with a small amount excellent. This is a significant improvement on the last inspection.

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	The behaviour of pupils and students is very good in lessons and in the way they move around school.
Attendance	Attendance is very good and has improved since the last inspection
Ethos*	The ethos for learning in the school is excellent. Pupils treat their work conscientiously and take great pride in their achievements. Teachers maintain very good working relationships and provide a very positive learning environment.
Leadership and management	The Headteacher provides very good direction for the work of the school and to raise standards. She sets very clear targets for the school to work towards. She is well supported by her staff and governors, although development planning is not always sufficiently detailed to provide realistic costing and effective ways to identify and evaluate how successful the school is in achieving its goals.
Curriculum	The curriculum is good and provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils. The curriculum for the sixth year is very good. There is a very wide range of extracurricular activities in which many pupils are involved. The carousel arrangements in Key Stage 3 sometimes cause problems in continuity of experience in music and single period lessons occasionally suffer from significant loss in time because pupils arrive late from lessons in other parts of the school.
Pupils with special educational needs**	Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good.
Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for moral development is very good and for social development is excellent. Spiritual development is unsatisfactory because there are insufficient planned opportunities for spiritual development within lessons, and collective worship does not meet statutory requirements.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Satisfactory overall. The provision of experienced and suitably qualified teachers and support staff to meet the needs of the curriculum is good. Arrangements for professional development of staff is unsatisfactory; not all teachers are appraised frequently enough and evaluation of teaching is not sufficiently systematic to identify and share good practice. Accommodation is satisfactory and the school has suitable resources to teach the National Curriculum and other subjects.
Value for money	Taking into account the attainment of pupils on entry to the school and their attainment on leaving the school, pupils' and students' good progress, the ethos for learning, pupils' positive attitudes, and the cost of educating pupils, the school gives very good value for money.

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

** *Predominantly pupils with visual impairment, physical disabilities and dyslexia.*

THE PARENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What most parents like about the school

- IX. Parents find the school approachable and supportive when there are problems.
- X. Good standards of work are achieved.
- XI. The school encourages pupils and students to become involved in the very wide range of extracurricular activities it provides.
- XII. Parents are satisfied with the work the school expects their daughters to do at home.
- XIII. The school's values and attitudes have a good effect on pupils.
- XIV. The school encourages and achieves high standards of behaviour.
- XV. Pupils and students enjoy coming to school.

What some parents are not happy about

- XVI. Some parents feel that they are not welcome
- XVII. A small proportion of parents feel that they
- XVIII. A small proportion of parents feel that the school is not doing enough to help their daughters' progress.
- XIX. One or two parents felt that they had not been consulted about dealing with bullying.

The inspection team is in agreement over the strengths that parents recognise in the school. During the inspection, evidence collected indicates that the school does a great deal to make parents feel welcome. Newsletters are sent home regularly and these, and the governor's annual report, outline the range of activities in which pupils are involved. Details of the school's curriculum are provided in prospectuses, curriculum statement issued with report for pupils in Year 7, 8, 9, and in the sixth form report. In addition, parents receive information about what the school teaches before pupils enter the school in Year 7. Inspectors support parents' views that reports in Key Stages 3 and 4 are not sufficiently informative about what their daughters know, understand and can do. The school's procedures to deal with unacceptable behaviour, including bullying, are good, and pupils spoken to during the inspection, and most parents spoken to before the inspection, confirmed this, and added that incidents of bullying were very rare. Parents are generally pleased with the standards achieved by the school in examinations and in lessons, although a few are concerned that standards are not as high as they had hoped in some lessons. Inspection evidence shows that although on a few occasions teachers do not make use of a wide enough range of teaching styles, teaching is mostly good or better.

KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

In order for the school to maintain its high standards and continue to improve, the Headteacher, staff and governors must now:

- I. provide sufficient time at Key Stage 4 and in Years 12 and 13 to ensure that the agreed syllabus for religious education can be taught to an appropriate depth; (Paragraphs 14, 39, 235)

- II. improve the process of development planning to ensure that:
 - governors are involved in systematically identifying realistically costed long and short-term goals and criteria by which they will evaluate the school's progress towards its targets; (Paragraph 75)
 - all heads of departments and staff systematically produce realistically costed development plans and the means by which they will measure achievement of their goals; (Paragraph 75)

- I. establish systematic procedures to continue improving teaching by:
 - identifying good teaching practice to share across the school; (Paragraphs 73, 75)
 - evaluating teaching frequently to provide targets for improvement; (Paragraph 73)
 - linking training consistently to development planning; (Paragraph 75)

- I. evaluate curriculum arrangements in order to:
 - reduce the significant amount of time lost in single lessons in history, modern foreign languages, physical education and science because pupils arrive late due to the distance between different teaching areas; (Paragraph 28)
 - provide more planned opportunities for spiritual development within the curriculum; (Paragraph 51)

- I. improve the quality of pupils' reports sent home to be more specific in the comments made on progress and attainment to ensure that there is clear information on the knowledge, understanding and skills which pupils gain; (Paragraph 67)

- II. monitor provision of information and communication technology systematically across the curriculum to ensure that all pupils consistently receive their entitlement; (Paragraph 38)

- III. meeting statutory requirements for:
 - collective worship; (Paragraphs 50, 74)
 - appraisal of teachers; (Paragraphs 73, 74)
 - special educational needs policy; (Paragraph 74)
 - including appropriate information on provision for pupils with special educational needs in the governors' annual report to parents; (Paragraph 74)

- I. ensure that isolation valves for the gas supply are provided in those laboratories not having them. (Paragraph 63)

In addition to the key issues above, the school needs to:

- reduce the disruption to the continuity of pupils' experience in music in Key Stage 3 caused by the carousel arrangements for teaching the subject. (Paragraphs 38, 206)

INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the school

1. West Kirby Grammar School for Girls is in the small town of West Kirby in the Wirral. The main building dates from 1913 but has been modified, most substantially in the 1950s and added to with an art block in the 1980s. In addition, the school has taken over two houses and has a number of temporary classrooms. The buildings stand in small grounds in which there are tennis courts and a hockey pitch. This pitch is now unusable because of stones and an uneven surface. The school has recently acquired a commitment from the local authority to share access on a local site. The authority has also committed itself to ensuring the security of the site and to site improvement with the addition of an astroturf surface, hockey pitch and athletics track to the standard needed for the school.

2. There are 1,246 pupils and students on roll, which is well above average for schools of the same type. There are 319 students in the sixth form. Pupils and students come to the school from 32 primary schools, mainly from the local area, which is predominately private housing. The school is selective; pupils take an entrance examination at 11-plus and the intake of the school broadly represents the top 30 per cent of attainment levels. Although attainment is above average overall on entry to the school, about one-third of pupils have average levels of attainment, and a smaller proportion of pupils than expected obtained the higher levels in the end of Key Stage 2 statutory assessments in 1999. Well below the average proportion of pupils come from homes where English is not the first language. Very few pupils have statements of special needs or are on the school's register for special educational needs. Those pupils on the register are predominantly pupils with visual impairment, physical disabilities or dyslexia. Less than four per cent of pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is well below average.

3. The school's aims include helping all pupils fully to develop academically and socially, to enjoy and appreciate education and learning, to develop self-respect and confidence built on knowledge of their own strengths, and to develop respect for others and to contribute to the larger community. The school also aims to help pupils develop a system of moral values, and to develop the skills, judgement, flexibility and willingness needed to respond to present demands and future changes in both their own lives and in society as a whole.

4. The school development plan has objectives of implementing curriculum changes demanded by legislation, increasing provision on site to accommodate Spanish and psychology and to develop its information and communication technology (ICT) facilities and equipment for all. The school also plans to increase its library resources, extend the range of opportunities to enrich pupils' and students' learning through extracurricular activities and residential experience. The school's academic targets were to achieve at least 50 per cent of A*/A grades and 95 per cent of A*-G grades in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations, and both of these have been achieved. At GCE A level, the target to achieve at least 50 per cent of A/B grades has been nearly met and 95 per cent target for A-E grades has been met.

4. **Key indicators**

Attainment at Key Stage 3¹

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	n/a	181	181

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

4. National Curriculum test results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	181	180	180
	Total	181	180	180
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	100 (98)	99 (98)	99 (94)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	98 (98)	93 (84)	82 (62)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

4. Teacher assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	181	181	179
	Total	181	181	179
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	100 (99)	100 (100)	99 (99)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	School	92 (88)	97 (83)	77 (93)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

Attainment at Key Stage 4²

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	n/a	191	191

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A* to G	1 or more grades A* to G
Number of pupils achieving standard specified	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	191	191	187
	Total	191	191	187
Percentage achieving standard specified	School	98 (95)	100 (98)	97.9 (99)
	National	46.3 (44.6)	90.7 (89.8)	95.7 (95.2)

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

Attainment in the sixth form³

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 who were entered for GCE A/AS examination in the latest reporting year:	Year	Male	Female	Total
	1999	n/a	145	145

² Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

³ Percentages in parentheses refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
	School	n/a	24.0	24.0 (23.5)	n/a	7.0
National	n/a	n/a	n/a (17.6)	n/a	n/a	n/a (2.8)

Number entered for the IB Diploma, and percentage of
such students who achieved this qualification:

	Number	% success rate
School	0	n/a
National		n/a

Number in final year of approved vocational qualifications and
percentage of *such students* who achieved these qualifications:

	Number	% success rate
School	0	n/a
National		n/a

Attendance

Percentage of half-days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year:			%
Authorised absence	School		4.5
	National comparative data		7.9
Unauthorised absence	School		0
	National comparative data		1.1

4.

4.

4. Exclusions

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

4. Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:		%
Very good or better		24
	Satisfactory or better	100
	Less than satisfactory	0

4. **PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL**

4. **EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL**

4. **Attainment and progress**

5.This is a very good school with high levels of attainment across all subjects (with the exception of religious education where the Local Agreed Syllabus is not fully implemented), at both key stages and in the sixth form. Attainment on entry to the school is above average overall although very few pupils reached the higher levels in the end of Key Stage 2 tests in English, mathematics and science taken in the last year in the primary school. A significant proportion of pupils obtained Level 4, the expected level.

6.In the end of Key Stage 3 national tests in 1999, all pupils obtained the expected levels or higher in English and mathematics and 99 per cent of pupils obtained these levels in science. Well above the national average proportion of pupils obtained higher levels in English, mathematics and science, although the performance of pupils was best in English, and better in mathematics than in science. Over the years 1997 to 1999, overall high standards have been maintained, but with improvements in mathematics and science. Standards are similar overall to those seen in other grammar schools. However, the school, in keeping with local authority policy, takes pupils of a wider range of abilities than often seen in grammar schools.

7.In other subjects, attainment is high, with the great majority of pupils exceeding national expectations, and a significant proportion obtaining the higher levels or working beyond the national expectation. Over the last three years, standards have been maintained overall, and have improved in information and communication technology (ICT).

8.In the 1999 General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations, 98 per cent of pupils obtained five or more A*-C grades which is an improvement on the results of 1998 and compares very well with other grammar schools. Fifty-one per cent of results obtained were A*/A grades, exceeding the school's own targets for 1999, and part of a steadily rising trend over recent years in the school.

9.Standards in all GCSE examination results were high, with a significant proportion of pupils in mathematics, biology, art, French, German, Spanish and geography above average achieving A* grades. Where there was a small proportion or no A* grades, in most cases this was where the subject was not chosen by many pupils.

10.In the 1999 General Certificate of Education (GCE) A level examinations, the average points score obtained by students taking two or more A levels, was better than in 1998. No national comparators for 1999 were available at the time of the inspection, but the average points score in 1998 was better than the national average.

11.Evidence from the inspection shows that attainment is above average overall at Key Stage 3, with a significant proportion of pupils reaching well above expectations. In English, pupils write well and extensively, and have well developed note-making skills. They read widely. In mathematics, pupils show good investigative approaches and in science pupils of all levels of attainment have a good grasp of scientific concepts. The lower attaining pupils in science know what the constituents of food are and how they are broken down by digestion. In art and in design and technology, pupils show good practical skills and use a wide range of tools well. They have good knowledge of colour theory and plan their work carefully. Pupils have a good understanding of what they learn and apply their understanding effectively. For example, in geography they explain well how people reduce the risk of flooding. In history, they have a good understanding of the events leading up to the Norman Conquest and in religious education they analyse and evaluate the arguments for the existence of God. In modern foreign languages, pupils learn a wide vocabulary, and speak confidently. Performance skills are adversely affected by the carousel system in music; the small proportion who do perform well are the instrumentalists. In ICT pupils have good practical skills and above average skills in word processing. Pupils have good basic skills in physical education and plan and evaluate their work well, especially in gymnastics. Attainment in drama provides a sound basis for Key Stage 4 work, with pupils developing confidence to perform.

12.Progress is good overall, in science it is very good and in drama it is satisfactory. Pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills develop well as they move through the key stage. Work is well planned so that pupils have a range of experiences to acquire knowledge and opportunities to consolidate their learning. In science, for example, ICT and independent learning are used well to reinforce learning from experimental work and

discussion. High expectations of accurate writing in English and provision of a wide range of reading material ensures that pupils make good progress in developing their vocabulary and punctuation. Good subject knowledge is used effectively to help pupils gain a wide range of skills in art. In design and technology, teachers' wide subject knowledge means that they can provide a wide range of contexts to help pupils develop their understanding of technological processes. In modern foreign languages, pupils make good progress in acquiring a wide vocabulary and good speaking skills because teachers are well qualified and use their own knowledge skilfully in helping pupils to develop their language skills. Teachers establish good working relationships in lessons which enables pupils to question and find out for themselves.

13. By the end of Key Stage 4 the attainment of pupils is above average overall and in all subjects a significant number of pupils obtain very high standards. In English, reading skills are well above average and pupils write with great fluency. Pupils have very good comprehension of difficult texts, for example, pre-twentieth century authors. Speaking skills are good. In mathematics, pupils have above average levels of competence in mental calculation, in handling mathematical data and working with two- and three-dimensional shapes. In science, pupils' knowledge in biology, chemistry and physics is well above average and pupils have a very good understanding of scientific ideas they have studied. Research skills of many pupils are beyond what is normally seen at GCSE and, for example, is evident in investigations into hormonal control in the human body. Practical and investigation skills are good. Standards in art, geography, history and modern foreign languages attainment are well above average. In other subjects, with the exception of religious education, attainment is above average. In art, pupils have very good practical skills and a very good understanding of the influence of a wide range of cultures on the development of art. In geography, pupils have a very good understanding of the reasons for changes in towns and cities and in history they have a very good grasp of the social and economic changes leading to the two world wars. In modern foreign languages, pupils' use of fluent speech, extended writing and understanding of lengthy dialogue is well above average. The small number of pupils who take Latin read with understanding and translate from Latin to English accurately. In design and technology pupils' skills are above average. They design well, using their good understanding of diet to plan snack meals. In ICT pupils use spreadsheets and databases well. In business education pupils have a wide specialist vocabulary which they use effectively in explaining the effects of economic factors on marketing. In music pupils show good performance skills. In physical education, pupils have above average knowledge and understanding of health and related fitness issues. In religious education attainment is average overall and for those following the GCSE course, attainment is above average. Other pupils, however, often show below average attainment because there is not enough time to cover the agreed syllabus to sufficient depth.

14. Progress in Key Stage 4 is good overall, and for some higher attaining pupils is very good. In English progress is satisfactory overall, sustaining the high levels of attainment at Key Stage 3. Study skills are applied well to the wide range of material pupils are expected to read. On rare occasions some higher attaining pupils do not reach the levels they are capable of because the pace of lessons is not matched to pupils' needs. In mathematics progress is good with pupils making particularly good progress where the subject is related to real-life situations and challenges pupils to think mathematically and apply the skills they learn. Progress in science is good with further development in pupils' independent learning skills. Pupils acquire good subject knowledge and make good progress in investigation skills. In art, drama and geography progress is very good as a result of pupils gaining confidence and because teachers encourage and support pupils very well. Work is realistically demanding and pupils rise to the challenges presented. Work is well planned and pupils increasingly build on earlier knowledge and are encouraged to apply it, both through their own research and investigative work, and through application of new learning.

15. Attainment by the end of Year 13 is above average. In all subjects the highest attaining students have very well developed knowledge and understanding of the subjects they follow. In English there is a high level of command of vocabulary and mature, expressive reading. In mathematics, students make very good use of differential calculus, for example in modelling applied mechanics problems, and in science show an in-depth understanding of topics through discussion, such as aspects of carbon chemistry. In art, students produce very creative interpretations of war poets' writing using a wide range of practical approaches. In modern foreign languages students use well structured speech extensively, for example, in debate about current political and social issues. Students in religious education show a good understanding of the philosophy of religions. In history students' use of statistical analysis is very good, for example, in examining the factors associated with birth and death rates in the late eighteenth century. In geography, knowledge about changes in global temperatures is used very effectively to explain the causes of the ice age. Students' progress is good overall and in some subjects, for example, art, it is very good. Good use of resources, and students taking a high level of responsibility for their own learning coupled with clear guidance on the requirements of A level examinations, are important contributory factors in maintaining students' progress.

16. Standards of literacy are good overall, and they improve rapidly during Key Stage 3, helped by attention in English. Pupils' vocabulary increases in English, drama, science, music and religious education as a result of a clear focus on technical words in these subjects. Pupils read fluently and widely, and they write imaginatively in English and religious education. While few subjects allow pupils to write imaginatively, there are opportunities to write extended pieces in English, drama, history, geography, modern foreign languages, and in science when writing their responses to experiments. Pupils write for a variety of readers well in English and modern foreign languages. Standards of presentation are good.

17. Reading and writing are well above average and better than pupils' speaking skills. Pupils are sharp listeners in lessons, and when required to speak formally, they use mature language with confident ease. Their speaking demonstrates a thorough understanding through carefully structured answers, for example, in art where they explain the making of a sculpture or give the context for war poetry as the basis for a visual response, and through discussion and debate in English and religious education. When group work is appropriately used in subjects, speaking is focused and effective in developing pupils' understanding. However, in other subjects, pupils are expected to be listeners rather than speakers.

18. Pupils' standards of numeracy are generally good on entry to the school although a significant minority of pupils do not know their multiplication tables and number bonds thoroughly on arrival in Year 7. The school is sensibly developing strategies to improve general numeracy standards by incorporating regular short mental tests in lessons at both key stages.

19. Pupils use their mathematical skills successfully in several areas of the curriculum. They measure and weigh accurately in design and technology, plot graphs in science and geography, use algebraic formulae in spreadsheets in ICT and use data handling and analyses techniques in several A level subjects including business studies, physics, chemistry, biology, physical education and geography.

20. The majority of pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Some make good progress and move down the stages of the register; others move up in order to gain additional support.

20. Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

21. Pupils at the school have very good attitudes towards learning. This has a significantly positive effect on the standards they achieve at the school. This is particularly true in the increasing responsibility they show towards work and the quality of work they produce independently. Similarly, good attitudes were evident at the time of the last inspection. Parents are pleased with the standards of behaviour.

22. In the lessons seen during the inspection pupils' response was good overall and never less than satisfactory. Pupils are interested in their lessons and show a desire to succeed. They are conscientious in personal study and have good concentration levels. Pupils work responsibly and reliably when not closely supervised and complete homework punctually. Since the last inspection pupils have gained in the skills of self-evaluation and in some subjects set specific targets for their own improvement which helps raise their attainment. Pupils with special educational needs have positive attitudes to learning, and are determined to succeed.

23. The school has not had occasion to exclude any pupils in the last year, this is a reflection of the high standards of behaviour in the school. The school is orderly. Pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school. Pupils cope safely and sensibly with some of the narrow congested corridors at lesson changeovers. Pupils are generally proud of their school and the facilities available and treat these with respect, although there are a few untidy classrooms after break and lunchtimes.

24. The quality of relationships in the school is high. In lessons there is some excellent collaborative work. The very few cases of bullying which occur are sorted out effectively. Pupils show respect for others. In the inspection week a group of Year 10 drama pupils worked closely with pupils from a mentally and physically handicapped school to the mutual benefit of both.

25. Pupils in all year groups take full advantage of the very good opportunities provided for their personal development. They make and sell products for charity and take part in industrially led team building exercises. In the sixth form several pupils compete for and win bursaries to carry out projects abroad. Pupils have informal opportunities to make their views heard through their form tutors and Heads of Year, but lack a more formal way to contribute to school decision-making and ownership of rules and procedures. Sixth formers play a valuable role in supporting the younger pupils. The school prefects, form and house representatives contribute

effectively to the smooth running of the school.

25. Attendance

26. Attendance at the school is very good and shows an improvement from the previously satisfactory levels evident at the time of the last inspection. Attendance last year was 95.5 per cent, which is well above national averages.

27. Pupils are generally punctual to arrive at school in the mornings. On a number of occasions lessons start some ten minutes late. This is due to the transfer time between various parts of the building. As lessons are 35 minutes long, this significantly reduces the teaching time available.

27. QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

27. Teaching

28. The quality of teaching is a strength of the school. It is at least good in four out of five lessons and is satisfactory in one-fifth. It is very good or excellent in one-quarter of lessons. A small proportion is excellent and none is unsatisfactory. Some very good teaching was found in all subjects. This is an improvement on the last inspection, and teachers provide more opportunities for research and involve pupils in self-assessment, which has resulted in improved personal study and research skills. There are particular strengths in teachers' subject knowledge, the high levels of expectations and challenge, and the effective use of homework.

29. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good and the school has a policy of making this a priority in appointing new teachers. This has a positive impact on pupils' and students' performance in examinations. Planning is good and lessons have clear, appropriate objectives, which generally meet the learning needs of all pupils, including the highest attaining and the small minority of pupils with special educational needs. The sequencing of lessons and variety of methods used are good, particularly in geography, business studies, art and English. Teachers' expectations are almost always very high in over half the lessons taught and pupils are presented with challenging work, particularly in Key Stage 4. They are not consistently high enough for the highest attaining pupils in physical education. In modern languages, pupils are almost always expected to use and understand the foreign language as the medium of the lessons, even for difficult concepts, from the earliest lessons. In geography in Year 7, pupils are introduced to and understand the concept underpinning flood hydrographs, not normally introduced until the end of Key Stage 4, and they rise to this challenge. High expectations are also reflected in the demanding pace of lessons, as well as activities that challenge them, as in history lessons.

30. The management of pupils is good. Teachers assume good behaviour and have established very effective working relationships, focused on raising standards in lessons.

31. Teachers use a good range of teaching methods effectively. For example, the skilled use of demonstration in art increases the level of challenge for pupils, and excellent questioning skills in Year 13 business studies and modern languages, elicits responses of depth and quality. In Latin, story telling is used to good effect in bringing to life Roman times. The use of challenging guidelines to revise poetry in English is very effective in spurring new learning. However, there is some lack of consistency in English and mathematics lessons throughout the school, where teaching is occasionally over directive or not lively and does not enthuse pupils. In science, very little effective differentiation was seen, and in physical education, although good in most respects, methods used did not consistently take account of the needs of the highest attaining pupils.

32. Teachers make effective use of resources; for example in history, resources enable pupils to take responsibility for their own learning, and in A level biology a teacher-made model was very effective in the teaching of synapses and neurophysiology.

33. The quality of day-to-day assessment is good and is a strength in English and art. Teachers make sensitive interventions to ensure understanding, provide good models, or to make pupils think again, for example in physical education and modern languages. Regular marking and assessment in lessons in ICT, and design and technology help pupils to improve the quality of their work and the evaluations help the teachers to plan the next lesson. Day-to-day marking is generally good. Work is marked regularly and provides pupils with feedback to help them improve.

34. In most subjects, there is an effective approach to using homework to support pupils' learning. Pupils are involved in consolidation, research and extension activities. It is set regularly with clear deadlines and recorded clearly. In mathematics, homework is set in most lessons. Homework is effective in contributing to raising standards.

35. The teaching of pupils with special educational needs is good and is mostly by the provision of different tasks, or the use of support staff. There is excellent liaison between subject teachers and support staff, so that the pupil is taught as well as supported. For example, a pupil conducting an experiment was constantly asked what was happening when lime was being burnt, to encourage her to observe closely. Every opportunity was taken to reinforce known facts, such as which substances are filtrates. Specialised equipment, for example the use of computers, is encouraged in order to enhance pupils' learning.

36. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. Lessons provide more opportunities for pupils to undertake research and to become more responsible for and involved in their own learning. Work is generally well matched to pupils' and students' needs and is contributing to raising standards. Nevertheless, good practice is still not shared sufficiently rigorously between teachers.

36. The curriculum and assessment

37. Provision for the curriculum is good overall. At Key Stage 3 it is broad and balanced and meets the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum and for religious education, and there is an opportunity for all pupils to receive a certificate in ICT at the end of Year 9. While coverage of ICT within subjects is generally satisfactory, it is not consistent and monitoring and evaluation of coverage is not rigorous enough. Inconsistent coverage was seen in mathematics and modern foreign languages. The school is aware of this and plans to improve the situation are well advanced. All pupils follow a very good developmental programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) at Key Stages 3 and 4. At Key Stage 3 PSHE is taught by form tutors, following four themes: the individual, home and family, the community, and the world. At Key Stage 4 PSHE is allocated two periods per week, taught by subject specialists and visiting professionals within a design for living course. The course covers careers, health education, sex and drugs education, economic literacy and religious studies. Pupils have the opportunity for a period of work experience. Some subjects are taught as part of a carousel. This is generally effective but there is some disruption to the continuity of study in music. All pupils in Year 7 study French, and all add a second language in Year 8, chosen from German, Spanish and Latin. More than half the cohort choose to continue studying a second language through Key Stage 4.

38. The curriculum at Key Stage 4 is well balanced with pupils experiencing the core subjects complemented by an appropriate range of options. Pupils make choices from a wide range of GCSE courses, including a number of subjects not offered in Key Stage 3, for example, business studies, and child development, in addition to the range of subjects begun in Key Stage 3, and design for living. Schemes of work are well planned, and pupils achieve very good results in GCSE examinations. The choice of syllabus is appropriate in all subjects and in the majority of cases provides a sound basis for progression to A level or further study at post-16 level. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form statutory requirements are not fully met for religious education because there is insufficient time in Years 10 and 11, and in Years 12 and 13 to ensure coverage to the depth required by the locally agreed syllabus.

39. The curriculum in the sixth form is very good, offering students a choice from about 30 A level or AS level subjects, an increase since the last inspection. There is much good practice, for example students are accommodated if they wish to take three years to complete their post-16 studies. Students may continue with the subjects studied in Key Stages 3 and 4, or may add new ones such as fashion and fabrics, government and politics, psychology, sociology or theatre studies. They have the opportunity to take the second stage ICT certificate. Entry to A level courses normally requires students to have obtained at least five GCSE passes A*-C, but there is some flexibility, especially with subjects not previously studied. Many students add considerably to their qualifications and skills, and advanced level results reflect the individual encouragement and assistance which teachers provide. The sixth form curriculum is enhanced by a general studies course that builds on the pre-16 PSHE programmes although insufficient time is allocated to meet the statutory requirements for religious education. Students may choose to sit an A level examination in general studies at the end of Year 13. Further periods of work experience, leisure activities, supported self-study and a wide range of extracurricular activities complete the range of post-16 opportunities.

40. Work is well planned to match the learning needs of pupils or students in each key stage. There is little reference to differentiation in departmental schemes of work, but the majority of teachers demonstrate

awareness of the range of ability in their classes and lesson planning often takes into account the needs of learners at each end of the ability range. Homework assignments contribute effectively to the progress which is apparent in all subjects, and they are integrated into schemes of work, in order to make better use of the short lesson periods. Study skills, particularly those of note-taking, are systematically developed throughout the key stages, and are at their most impressive in the sixth form. Careers advice and guidance are very good, although some problems are beginning to emerge over the support provided by the national careers services. There are very strong links with local business and industry, especially through the Merseyside Industry and Commerce Awards (MICA) course and general studies programmes in the sixth form, and some students take part in work experience exchanges in European countries.

41. The range of extracurricular activities available to pupils throughout their school career is very good. Activities are popular and well supported and include visits outside school as well as overseas exchanges, or residential outdoor pursuits experiences. There are six school houses, whose activities and competitions complement individual choices, for example through the provision of opportunities in music, sports, photography, drama and quizzes. Hockey, netball and athletics are provided and are well supported. The house points system is popular with pupils, as are the full attendance awards. Of the many and varied extracurricular activities available, some examples include debating societies, electronics club, orchestras, sailing, Christian Focus, and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. The school also organises a number of special events such as a special projects week in Year 7, the Health Education Conference in Year 8, Wider Horizons in Year 9, Compact Week for work-related learning in Year 10, the A level Forum in Year 11, and additional opportunities in the sixth form. This wide range complements the high academic standards achieved by pupils, and makes a significant additional contribution to the intellectual, social and cultural development of pupils.

42. Many subjects include attention to equal opportunities in their schemes of work and staff strive to provide this ideal. Achievements of individual pupils are closely monitored, and the destinations of leavers are well documented. There are also measures to ensure equality of opportunity for members of staff. In all subjects teachers have opportunities to teach at different levels, including the sixth form. An extra lesson is timetabled to provide additional support for some A level students.

43. Procedures for assessment are good overall, and the school has responded well to the key issue of assessment raised in the previous inspection report. There are effective systems for assessing pupils' attainment in place in most departments. The results of mid-year assessments and end of year examinations are used effectively to monitor pupils' progress, at whole-school, year group, and departmental levels. Marking of classwork and homework, and teacher recording of attainment and progress, are good overall, and a particular strength, for example, in geography. There are, however, some inconsistencies between departments in the grading systems used in marking, which do not help pupils to understand how well they are progressing.

44. The school makes sound use of benchmark data, the results of standardised tests, and of GCSE results, to analyse pupils' performance, and inform planning. The use of this data is improving, as departments set targets, and identify and implement strategies for raising pupils' attainment at GCSE and GCE A level.

45. Since the previous inspection, the school has done much to encourage all pupils to take greater responsibility for their own learning, through the use of self-assessment. Pupils are provided with regular and well-structured opportunities to evaluate their own progress, and set personal targets for raising their attainment. They receive effective guidance from their form tutors and produce clear, often perceptive targets for improvement. Pupils incorporate these targets into their personal statements for the mid-year reports, which their form tutors now record as an aid to monitoring.

46. The use of assessment to help curriculum planning is good overall. It is a strength of English at Key Stage 4. Science responded quickly to the end of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests results in 1998, improving the quality of textbooks, assessment procedures, and by modifying some aspects of what was taught in the classroom. Religious education has introduced a more challenging scheme of work into Year 9, in response to issues identified through assessment. There are, however, some subjects where assessment information has not been effectively used, for example, physical education.

47. The record of achievement is informative and well-organised, and well related to the assessment and reporting. The Compact System is of value at Key Stage 4, in helping the school to identify pupils who may be experiencing difficulties in managing their work, so that they may be given appropriate guidance and support.

48. The curriculum is disapplied for one pupil with special educational needs. Assessment for pupils with

special educational needs uses the standard attainment targets and the published tests used by the school. The school's system of recording the needs and progress of pupils with special educational needs does not always provide sufficient detail so that future work and support can be better planned. Reviews are often more frequent than statutorily required, which is very good practice as it allows short-term targets to be monitored. Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) are detailed with clear targets; for example one target was to have an 80 per cent success rate in bringing in homework. IEPs are distributed to departments, which ensures that all are aware of pupils' needs. There has been valuable liaison with primary schools to ensure smooth transition between schools.

48. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

49. Provision for moral, social and cultural development is good overall and presents a similar picture to that found at the previous inspection. Moral and social provision are strong. However, the provision for spiritual development is unsatisfactory. The school has not addressed one of the key issues from the previous inspection, namely to provide a daily corporate act of worship for all pupils. In the sixth form there is no daily act of collective worship, and some form assemblies in Years 10 and 11 do not always include adequate opportunity for reflection or worship. Nevertheless, the quality of many assemblies is good. Pupils start each day with a school, year or form assembly. The main assemblies are of good quality. They are sincere and focused on Christian or moral themes and include an act of worship. Pupils take an active part in these occasions with music and readings. In form-time assemblies pupils read from an appropriate selection of moral and multicultural themes.

50. Religious education lessons provide opportunities for pupils to discuss different beliefs. In English lessons there are spiritual moments in the study of poetry or through the finely crafted language of classical literature. However, opportunities to develop pupils' spiritual awareness are missed in some other subjects and are not consciously planned for in the curriculum.

49. The school provides a very good moral education. The programme of social and personal education is effective. Pupils learn to discuss moral issues and ethics. They consider real life problems and dilemmas and show a clear grasp of right from wrong. In Year 7 pupils learn about citizenship and successfully take part in a civic award scheme. Issues raised in assemblies encourage pupils and students to consider the plight of disadvantaged people and political prisoners around the world. In lessons, teachers set good examples of how to behave and pupils respond well to this showing high levels of respect for each other and teachers.

50. There is excellent provision for social development. Relationships throughout the school are very good. Students in the sixth form organise social and sporting events for pupils and help with paired reading. Pupils take part in a very good range of extracurricular activities. These include residential visits. The outdoor pursuits residential visit in Year 7 helps to form friendships. The house system in the school works effectively, helping to bond the different year groups. Opportunities to take part in conferences, industrially led team building and problem solving challenges strongly complement the social provision. Most subjects include group and individual activities and pupils work well together.

51. Cultural development is good. There are good opportunities to appreciate culture with visits to theatres, art galleries and concerts. The 'wider horizons' week in Year 9 includes an innovative visit to a theme park to look at the application of mathematics and science in the rides. The school holds an interesting European Awareness conference. There are good links with schools abroad through visits and correspondence. In history and Latin classical culture is discussed. In art the influence of African, American and Indian cultures are explored. However there is insufficient development of appreciation of non-European societies and civilisations.

52. All pupils with special educational needs play a full part in the life of the school. For example, pupils are taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh awards, and assistance in carrying their bags is proposed, to enable them to participate in the overnight camp.

54. **Support, guidance and pupils' welfare**

53.The support, guidance and care that the school takes of its pupils and students is good, a situation that has been maintained since the last inspection. This good pastoral provision has been maintained. Relationships in the school between pupils and between pupils and staff are very good. There are effective induction procedures for Year 7 pupils, who settle quickly into school routines. The residential visit to Oaklands, accompanied by sixth form students, helps to establish good pastoral relationships. Parents and pupils are very pleased with the support and values at the school.

54.The procedures to monitor academic progress are good. Subject teachers give pupils effective academic guidance. Pupils are involved in self-evaluation and setting of their own targets, this is particularly effective in the English department. Subject departments have their own systems for reporting attainment with the marks in the exam set in the subject. Pupils are thus not always clear enough about their performance relative to National Curriculum levels or to predicted GCSE results. This was also noted at the time of the previous inspection.

55.Pupils are given good guidance at key transition points, to choose their options and future education or career routes. The programme of personal and social education is effective. Year 10 pupils take part in the Compact scheme which is effective in promoting good attitudes and personal qualities. A high number of pupils take part in the character building opportunities of the Duke of Edinburgh award. Sixth formers have excellent opportunities for personal development. For example several teams successfully compete in MICA to compete and present solutions to industrial problems.

56.The quality of careers work is very good, in spite of limited support from the local careers service, a national problem at the time of the inspection. Industrialists and business personnel visit the school regularly, providing effective support for the school's work. Pupils and students participate in an extensive programme of work experience and mock interviews are arranged to develop pupils' confidence and skills of presentation. Opportunities are provided for pupils and students to participate in conferences and conventions. Careers work is a strong feature of the PSHE programme from Year 9 onwards. The quality of support for students in the sixth year is very good, with a strong emphasis on students taking personal responsibility for their own career choices and higher education.

57.Behaviour management is good. Teachers expect and assume that behaviour will be good and pupils live up to these expectations. There are few explicit school rules but assemblies, form time and the house system help to establish a clear ethos. There are some minor areas where there is lack of clarity. For example pupils are unsure whether they are allowed to wear coats when transferring to the outside classrooms in the rain. Measures to deal with any bullying are effective; pupils feel that the school's procedures work very well in the very rare incidents that occur. Sanctions are effective and rarely needed. The house point system works well.

58.There are good procedures to promote and monitor school attendance. Recording procedures meet statutory requirements, but greater care is needed to ensure that all registers are closed promptly at the end of the morning registration period. Heads of year and form tutors are vigilant to follow up on any absence from school.

59.Pupils with special education needs obtain very good support from outside agencies, in particular the excellent vision support service. The subject teachers have been involved, and the limitations of these pupils have been made clear to staff. Specialist facilities are provided. Very good support is given to these pupils by other pupils in the school. Where necessary, the form tutor meets weekly with a pupil, and this good practice allows concerns to be raised. Excellent support is also given by technicians, who provide support when needed.

60.Health and safety procedures are satisfactory. The issues identified in the last inspection have been dealt with. The school has conducted risk assessments as required. Several concerns were discussed with the school during the week of inspection. These include: the lack of gas isolation taps in some science laboratories, public access for dog walking on the sports fields used by the school, and water leaking into some of the external classrooms and lack of heating in one. There is good provision for first aid and pupils taken ill at the school are well cared for. There are satisfactory arrangements for child protection in place, which comply with the legislation.

62. Partnership with parents and the community

61.The school's partnership with parents and the local community is good overall. The school is a popular choice with parents. The outcomes of the survey of parents' opinion of the school's provision in advance of the inspection was positive. Parents raised no significant matters of dissatisfaction, though parents say that they would like more news about schoolwork and some refinements to the progress reporting arrangements, particularly with an earlier meeting with the teachers in Year 7.

62.Parents' strong backing for the school values and for education has a very positive influence on the standards achieved. The parents' association gives good support to the school with fundraising and social events.

63.Information for parents, including that provided in the prospectus, is satisfactory. Parents are provided with good information for pupils entering the school in Year 7, with information about subject choices at the end of Year 9 and options for post-16 courses and choices for post-18. Opportunities are provided for parents to visit the school to speak to staff, and in the sixth form parents are provided with details of university application regulations through meetings and information sent home. Nevertheless, inspectors agree with the views of some parents that the school does not publicise its significant achievements in enough detail.

64.The school meets the statutory requirements for reporting pupils' progress apart from in ICT at Key Stage 4. Over and above these requirements the school provides an interim report. The quality of reports to parents is satisfactory overall although the use of computer comment banks results in some identical subject reports for pupils of differing levels of attainment. In addition, reports do not consistently provide sufficient detail of what pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 know, understand or can do, or indicate what they need to do to improve. There is good follow-up of reports for pupils, through at least one tutorial period, and parents have the opportunity to comment on return slips. In the sixth form, reports are detailed and informative and give clear indication to students of their progress and areas for development.

65.There are constructive links with the local community. Many sixth formers participate in the Wirral Community Service Award. The school has good pastoral links with its diverse feeder primary schools, although curricular links are underdeveloped. There are very strong links in modern foreign languages with schools abroad, with many opportunities for pupils to visit European countries. Pupils benefit from the strong support of local employers for their work experience in Year 11 and in the sixth form.

66.Staff have worked hard to establish a very good partnership with industry. There is a carefully planned work related input for each year group, which has a very positive effect on pupils' personal development and their awareness of opportunities in the world of work. In Year 7 pupils have an exciting activities week where they design, cost, manufacture and market a product. Year 9 take part in an excellent wider horizons week with visits to employers, workshops and team-building exercises in school.

67.In the sixth form pupils participate in a stimulating Challenge of Europe Conference. The support provided by the Community and Neighbourhood Scientists and the Neighbourhood Engineers brings first hand relevance to pupils' science work and presents positive encouragement for pupils to pursue a career in the sciences and engineering.

69. THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

69. Leadership and management

68.The leadership and management of the school are good. The Headteacher provides very good leadership and gives very clear direction for the work of the school to raise and maintain standards. Her targets for improvement are agreed effectively with governors and teachers. Heads of subject departments are given their own targets in line with whole-school targets and are provided with appropriate statistical information to help them work effectively to raise standards. The Headteacher has the confidence of staff and governors and staff work to her targets and respect her drive.

69.The senior team work effectively together and have well defined responsibilities which they carry out well. The quality of subject management is generally good, with well led teams of subject teachers. Heads of departments work increasingly well together on common targets and in developing their roles as managers, and the Headteacher places particular value on this. Special educational needs is well managed and there are annual

reviews in accordance with the Code of Practice.

70.The quality of support and evaluation of teaching and curriculum development is satisfactory overall, and parts of it are good. The support for heads of departments is good. There is a thoughtfully planned programme of development, for example, to help heads of departments in observing and evaluating teaching, analysing assessment information and comparing the performance of different subjects. Heads of departments have also been supported in helping them identify how their own departments work and there are regular planned opportunities to share experiences of subject management. Teachers receive much informal support. However, although there is an appraisal system, appraisal of teachers is not sufficiently frequent and there is no systematic regular observation of teaching with targets for improvement and review of progress towards targets. Nevertheless, there is some good practice around school, for example, in English and science.

71.Implementation of the school's aims and policies is good. A wide range of policies are in place. There are policies for all subjects and sex education and drugs awareness are taught well through the PSHE programme. There are schemes of work for all subjects and although they do not contain documented opportunities for spiritual development, some teachers incorporate opportunities in individual lessons. The Code of Practice for pupils with special educational needs is implemented in practice but written policy, and completion of the school register are not complete. The governors' annual report to parents does not give sufficient details on how resources have been allocated for special educational needs. The policy for collective worship is good and the quality of all house assemblies and the majority of class assemblies is also good. Daily collective worship is not established in the sixth form and on occasions class assemblies in Key Stage 4 do not meet statutory requirements, because they do not include an opportunity for reflection or prayer. Statutory requirements are not met for the appraisal of teachers. Although the school has an appraisal policy, for some teachers appraisal has not taken place for a considerable time.

72.Development planning is unsatisfactory overall, but within this there are some strengths. The Headteacher has very clear objectives that are effectively communicated to governors and staff, and there is no doubt that these objectives are shared and agreed between governors and the great majority of staff. Nevertheless, the development planning process is not secure. There is no evidence in the school development plan of long-term planning and governors do not have a strategic development plan for the school. Costings are sometimes vague and the means to reach targets and evaluate how effectively they have been achieved are not sufficiently well developed, particularly at departmental level and sometimes amongst governors. Targets for raised levels of attainment at GCSE have been met and the measure of success is relatively straightforward to evaluate. However, other objectives of the school development plan, for example, increasing the use of ICT by pupils and students, and broadening the range of teaching styles employed by teachers are not so readily measurable. Training is not consistently linked to departmental development plans. Neither the school nor departmental development plans consistently have appropriate procedures which enable governors or staff to evaluate achievement of goals effectively. Heads of departments are expected to plan their own ways to achieve targets, and although they have had some support to do this, there are no effective strategies in place to ensure this happens.

73.The ethos of the school is excellent. Pupils and students enjoy being in school. They know that they are expected to work hard and do so. They appreciate the care and consideration they receive from the Headteacher and all other staff and respond very well, returning the consideration for each other and others less fortunate than themselves. They take part in a wide range of extracurricular activities willingly and enthusiastically. Teachers work hard, set high expectations and give a lot of their own time.

75. Staffing, accommodation and learning resources

74.Staff are well qualified and experienced. In modern foreign languages for example, there is sufficient staff expertise to teach four languages to examination standard, and two more at a basic level. Teaching staff are deployed efficiently and effectively. Technicians are appropriately qualified and facilitate pupils' learning through effective support in subjects. A satisfactory level of clerical and administrative staff support the work of the school effectively and although the library is inadequately staffed at the moment, a qualified librarian has now been appointed with effect from the beginning of the spring term.

75.Overall, arrangements for the professional development of teachers are unsatisfactory, but there are some strengths. For example, since the last inspection there has been a comprehensive programme of in-service training for middle managers including some self-development. However, this is in its early stages and the impact has been variable, for example, heads of department do not have effective strategies to evaluate

achievement of targets. Arrangements for the induction of newly qualified staff are satisfactory, although arrangements for the induction of other staff new to the school are not so well organised. There is a policy for the appraisal of teachers, but it is not fully implemented because some teachers are not appraised sufficiently frequently. Staff development is not appropriately linked to the school development plan and there is very little evaluation of the impact of in-service training.

76.The school's accommodation is adequate overall for the number of pupils and there is sufficient space. However, there are some examples of overcrowding in classrooms, and outdoor facilities for physical education are inadequate and have not improved since the last inspection although recent negotiations with the local authority are likely to result in significant improvements. There is also a shortage of specialist science accommodation, with several science lessons being taught in classrooms rather than laboratories. A new drama studio is a significant improvement but English lessons are still taught in many different areas of the school, adversely affecting the efficient use of resources. Some temporary classrooms are in an unsatisfactory state of repair, have inadequate heating and surface water between some of these rooms does not drain away properly.

77.Most of the accommodation is very welcoming and is well cared for by pupils and staff. It provides a suitable and often stimulating working environment, with many examples of very good display work.

78.Expenditure on learning resources is appropriate and there is an adequate range of good quality learning resources to support the teaching of all subjects. The ratio of computers to pupils at 1:10 is in line with the national average, although the use and availability of computers in subjects across the curriculum is inconsistent between subjects. Specialist ICT rooms adjacent to the library are well equipped and generally well used. The library is well used by pupils, but despite expenditure increasing steadily over recent years, the total number of books is below the recommended level.

80. The efficiency of the school

79.The quality of financial planning is good. The school has an informal policy of directing a much higher than average proportion of the budget on teaching staff and resources and spending is low in all other areas. The quality of teaching within the school has improved since the last inspection. The issues addressed in the school development plan are broadly effective in raising standards in the school, and in providing its ethos, and there is a clear link between priorities set and the annual budget process. Decisions are based on an informal, ongoing evaluation by the Headteacher and the senior management team, in consultation with heads of department and governors. Formal systems and processes, however, are unsatisfactory and do not ensure the effectiveness of evaluation. Costings in the school development plan are vague; success criteria are not sufficiently specific in order to judge the effectiveness of spending decisions to any degree of accuracy. The process of long term planning is not sufficiently well developed to involve governors effectively in identifying targets, realistic costing and means to evaluate success. Work on benchmarking against similar schools and analysing the value added by the school are in the early stages. This issue was raised during the last inspection and there has been only a little subsequent improvement.

80.The standard of financial control and school administration is good. The annual budget is set and regularly reviewed and monitored by the finance committee of the governing body, which is very supportive of the school. The management of the budget is good, with sound internal control systems. The minor issues raised in the audit of July 1998 have been addressed, and the overall judgement was that financial procedures operate well. School administration operates efficiently and effectively, in spite of the fact that spending in this area is very low, and the school runs very smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The office staff are efficient and support the teaching staff in working more effectively.

81.A higher than average percentage of the budget is made available for education resources through capitation. This is effectively allocated by formula funding, and by application to the Headteacher for additional resources. Although there is strong central control of the budget, the system is clear to staff and there are sufficient resources in all departments to support the effective delivery of the curriculum. The money is used well by middle managers and budget control is effective. The funding for pupils with special educational needs is good. The Year 12 and 13 budget is effectively calculated to balance the cost effectiveness of numbers in sets and to adjust the subjects offered in line with changing needs and interests. The school supports a number of small groups in, for example Latin and design and technology, whilst elsewhere, particularly in the sixth form, there are relatively large A level groups. However, this does not appear to have an adverse impact on standards achieved in the sixth form; the overall pupil-teacher ratio is below the average and pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum.

82.The school has a good balance of experienced teaching staff who are well qualified. The deployment of teaching staff is good. Spending on support staff is low and they provide an effective service. The efficiency of technicians in science is reduced because of the distance between the laboratories they service. Overall, deployment of staff is good.

83.Accommodation is generally used well, for example the library, ICT facilities and art are used well out of teaching time and subject accommodation is used effectively. However, pupils and staff are regularly late for lessons due to difficulties of movement around the school combined with an eight period day.

84.Taking into account the above average attainment on entry to the school, the good overall progress made by pupils and students and their very good examination results at GCSE and A level, the very good attitudes and behaviour of pupils and students, the good quality of teaching and the average unit cost, the school provides very good value for money.

86. PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

86. ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

86. English

85. In the end of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests in 1999, the school's results were well above the national average, and well above those for similar schools. The overall trend has been of improving levels of attainment in Key Stage 3 results in recent years. In the GCSE examinations in 1999, the proportion of pupils who gained A*-C grades was well above the national average. Improvements in GCSE results over time have matched the national trend. The pass rates in the 1999 A level examinations were high when compared with the national average. All students gained a pass, and English results were above those gained in other subjects in the school. In recent years, results for the three English examinations at A level (literature, language and combined) have fluctuated, but language and the combined results rose markedly in 1999 from those of previous years.

86. By the end of Key Stage 3, the attainment of pupils is well above average. Pupils' reading and writing are well above average and the fluency with which they speak about their ideas is above average. Most pupils read independently, and most of them thoroughly enjoy their reading. This was seen in lessons and in their reading logs, where the pupils write freely about their reading. Choices vary in challenge, but the highest attaining pupils relish books of the calibre of Jostein Gaarder's 'Sophie's World' as well as the latest best-selling children's literature, such as the 'Harry Potter' books. Lower attaining pupils read classic authors, such as Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters with understanding. The difference in attainment is seen in the quality of written responses to their reading: lower attaining pupils describe the plot and main characters competently, while higher attaining pupils respond with flair, explaining their appreciation of the novelist's detail and creation of social contexts for the characters. All pupils write extensively, in class and at home, and write creatively and formally for a wide range of purposes and readers. Their writing is accurate, uses a wide range of vocabulary and is well punctuated. Higher attaining pupils avoid commonplace phrases, while lower attaining pupils' choice of phrases and vocabulary improves after teachers' guidance. Responses to imagery in what they read in class show a keen awareness of media. Integration of the speaking, reading and writing in the teaching of English strongly supports attainment in both key stages and the sixth form.

87. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is also well above national average. The pupils follow challenging courses for their two English GCSEs, in which they learn to appreciate a wide range of poetry, drama and prose from English literary heritage, including influential contemporary writers. When they are speaking about the books they are studying, most pupils make a personal response. Many speak with feeling about characters and about images poets use, understanding the author's intended purpose. Higher attaining pupils adopt a range of appropriate writing styles with accuracy, imagination and consistent attention to the reader, as seen in lessons on 'Paddy Clarke Ha Ha Ha' by Roddy Doyle, a GCSE set text. Lower attaining pupils produce writing that has sound punctuation and grammar and possesses an understanding of the main character's confused emotions. Pupils continue in Key Stage 4 to read for pleasure, write at length with accuracy and perception, and fashion detailed structured argument from their own ideas and those collected through discussion and research.

88. Attainment by the end of Year 13 is well above national average. Most students speak about their studies with confidence and a growing command of complex language of literary and linguistic criticism. In their written responses to texts such as Shakespeare's 'Measure for Measure' and 'King Lear', the highest attaining students show a mastery of detail. All students' work uses carefully structured argument. Most students are independent readers who make balanced judgements. Lower attaining students bring together aspects of conflicting critical judgements, and respond well to language in everyday use. By studying Keri Hulme's 'The Bone People', students of English Combined appreciate variations in English occurring as a result of its separate development around the world.

89. Progress at the end of Key Stage 3 is good. Standards of literacy on entry to the school are good overall, but with weaknesses in spelling and punctuation and a narrow range of vocabulary. However, by the end of Year 9, literacy standards are much higher. Particular attention is paid in English to improvements in written accuracy and the range of books that the pupils read. Most pupils become confident writers of critical analysis, as seen in the wide variety of responses to 'Romeo and Juliet' in Year 9, some showing considerable insight into Juliet's predicament. They are also readers of habit and confidence. They talk about books with enthusiasm, and their independence as learners is helped by useful note-taking skills. Pupils make improvements to their work by careful re-drafting, incorporating second thoughts and showing greater awareness of their readers, as seen in a

collection of the pupils' poetry.

90. Progress at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory: the high level of attainment in Key Stage 3 is sustained in Key Stage 4. Study skills already acquired are applied to the rich diet of reading the pupils are required to follow. The number of passes at grades A* or A is not as high as it could be, because pupils work in some lessons at the pace that the teaching commands, when they are capable of faster progress. However, the introduction of effective strategies to enable pupils to work at a pace suited to individual needs is addressing this issue successfully. Though pupils have occasional access to ICT in Key Stage 3 as part of their English lessons, access overall is too irregular to support progress in thinking and writing skills in both key stages. As in Key Stage 3, the highest attainers thrive on the high quality of experience of literature, as seen in a Year 10 lesson studying a poem by Maya Angelou. Exploring the feelings aroused by the poem sharpened their thinking and enlivened the subsequent writing.

91. Progress in Years 12 and 13 is good and is characterised by the development of a broad intake of students into capable and successful learners. Many students enter sixth form English groups as careful, thoughtful writers, and by the end of Year 13 write with some flair. The growing independence of the students as thinkers and writers is the main factor in the good progress made.

92. Attitudes are never less than positive and are a key factor in the high attainment and good rates of progress. The pupils enjoy their English lessons; they work hard on their homework and show an eagerness to acquire new learning. With the encouragement of their teachers, it is acceptable in English for the pupils to be studious and openly to display a liking for literary classics and other books for mature minds.

93. Teaching is good overall and never less than satisfactory. Teaching is better in the sixth form than in the key stages, where two out of four lessons are good and a further one of the four is very good. English teachers have very good subject knowledge. Their planning of lessons and schemes of work is good, characterised by challenge and pace, though not all lessons are taught in the way to meet each pupil's needs. Very effective teaching was seen in a Year 9 lesson in which pupils were encouraged successfully to reflect on their reading, justifying their choice by addressing the class with eloquence and humour. The pupils had to take responsibility for what they were doing under the guidance of the teacher, rather than waiting to be told what to do or think at each stage in the lesson. Similarly successful teaching was seen in a sixth form revision session in which students defended their ideas on 'King Lear'. The teacher was guide and supporter, not director, of students' thinking; students detected for themselves most of the weak arguments.

94. The subject is managed well, with clarity of vision and a strong sense of priorities. Planning for progress is very good, while another strength of English teaching is the assessment. The pupils are given clear guidelines for progress, which they appreciate. Teachers interview many of them to give them individual explanations about their attainment and how they should improve their work. Pupils' honest appraisal of their own progress also widens their experience as writers.

95. Though there is no formal monitoring of the teaching to increase the number of very effective lessons, there has been a great deal of improvement since the previous inspection, particularly in assessment and providing opportunities for personal study. A level students approach source materials with greater confidence than in 1995; they appreciate what they read, often showing a high level of individual interpretation and explanation. A level literature examination results are now well above national average. All pupils encounter a rich range of intellectually demanding novels as part of a GCSE course that requires them to tackle whole books rather than extracts. Unlike the position reported in 1995, there are now opportunities in most lessons for pupils to take responsibility for their own learning, which is a key characteristic of the steadily rising standards in English in the school. Standards of literacy are good overall.

96. Reading and writing skills are well above average and better than pupils' speaking skills. Pupils listen well and use mature language with confidence, using technical vocabulary well in English, drama, science, music and religious education. In group work in these subjects, speaking plays an important part in developing pupils' understanding, and is actively encouraged. However, in other subjects, pupils are expected to be listeners rather than speakers. They read widely, and they write imaginatively in English, religious education, drama, history, geography, modern foreign languages, and in science. Standards of presentation are good. Pupils' skills improve rapidly during Key Stage 3, and continue to improve in Key Stage 4. In the sixth form, students develop very good command of literacy skills which are evident in writing and speech predominantly, and show they can sustain argument and debate skilfully.

98. Mathematics

97. In the end of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests in 1999 pupils' attainment was very high compared to the national average at both Levels 6 and 7. These results were a significant improvement on the previous year for Level 6 but slightly down at Level 7. In the GCSE examinations in 1999 pupils attained very high results for both A*-C grades and for the highest grades A* and A compared to national averages. These results were a small improvement on those of the previous years. Pupils did well in mathematics. The results were similar to those for other grammar schools for A*-C grades. In the A level examination in 1999 all students attained A-E grades. This was an improvement on the previous year though the percentage of highest grades was down in a small entry. These results were better than national average figures for grades A-E and better than most subjects in the school.

98. The test and examination results broadly reflect the intake to the school which is above the national average. Pupil results at GCSE were close to the value added predictions from the average scores for this cohort of pupils' National Curriculum test results at Key Stage 3 in 1997.

99. From lesson observations and the inspection of pupils' work, by the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 pupils are attaining similar standards to those shown in the 1999 end of Key Stage 3 tests and the GCSE examinations. By the end of both key stages pupils attain above the national average standards. Sixth form students are attaining similar standards to those seen in the 1999 GCE A level examination results. By the end of Year 13, students attainment is above the national average for A level students.

100. Pupils generally attain above national averages in all aspects of the subject at both key stages. Basic numeracy skills are good, especially in Key Stage 3, through regular short, sharp sessions on mental skills in line with the national numeracy strategy. Attainment in space and shape and data handling is generally good. For example, the great majority of pupils use Pythagoras' theorem effectively to calculate the areas of different trapezia. At Key Stage 4, attainment in investigations is improving and, for example, particularly good work was seen in some Year 11 lessons on equable shapes which made very good use of geometric and algebraic skills. Pupils use of trigonometric relationships is above average and they can calculate well mentally. Pupils use calculators sensibly and accurately, and they use graphical calculators well in Year 11 classes. Some pupils' ICT skills are good and used effectively in both key stages. In a higher attaining Year 10 class, for example, particularly successful use was made of specialist software where pupils investigated intersection of quadratic curves and linear curves effectively. There is insufficient use of ICT as a general resource in mathematics lessons, however. Students' attainment in the sixth form is above average and sometimes well above average. Students apply algebraic manipulation skills effectively and to model real world situations. Very effective investigations showing the successful development of modelling skills using algebra into conservation of linear momentum problems were seen in Year 13 work.

101. Pupils use their mathematical skills successfully in several areas of the curriculum. They measure and weigh accurately in design and technology, plot graphs in science and geography, use algebraic formulae in spreadsheets in ICT and use data handling and analyses techniques in several A level subjects including business studies, biology, chemistry, geography, physics, and physical education.

102. Progress at both key stages is generally good. Numeracy skills develop well because of teachers' focus on mental calculation skills and controlled use of calculators. Algebraic techniques develop gradually over the two key stages, so for example, a Year 8 middle attaining class successfully learned to evaluate algebraic expressions involving directed numbers and a higher attaining Year 11 group solved complex inequality problems with comparative ease. Particularly good progress is made in the using and applying attainment target. Pupils make good progress in investigations especially when real world data is involved.

103. In the sixth form, students make good progress in developing new skills. They learn to use the differential and integral calculus effectively to model many aspects of applied mathematics. Their modelling of the flight of a projectile off a sloping ramp showed good analytical skills. They make good use of graphical calculators and ICT in their work.

104. Attitudes to learning and using mathematics are good and often very good. Pupils really love to participate in debate and to come to the blackboard to demonstrate their understanding of the subject. They use mathematical terminology well and enjoy working in small groups. They concentrate well in lessons and pupils often develop understanding well on their own. Sixth form students are generally very mature in outlook and behaviour. They enjoy intellectual challenge in the subject. Pupils standards of presentation are generally good

and their oral skills are likewise good.

105. Teaching is generally good with small proportions that are very good and satisfactory. This is a significant improvement on the previous inspection. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan well so that activities are well organised and presented well to pupils. Work is marked accurately and regularly. Teachers' control is generally effortless and they use homework and assessment well to plan for the future learning of pupils. The pace of lessons is generally good and teachers have good expectations of solid work and behaviour of their pupils. Teaching in the department is generally traditional, and occasions teachers talk for too long and pupils lose interest. In the best teaching, good use of resources, for example ICT and graphical calculators, and topical mathematical problems from the real world which pupils can relate to, encourage an enthusiastic response from pupils. Use of ICT, including the Internet, is underdeveloped and not used enough in lessons.

106. The department is generally well managed on a day-to-day basis. The very hard working, dedicated and sensitive head of department has made considerable progress in terms of bringing the department forward. However the present collegiate style of management is not entirely appropriate given the age and experience and current responsibilities of the teaching team. There is no whole-team approach to teaching the subject, so good practice is not effectively shared. Responsibilities within the department have not been reviewed sufficiently, staff development is underdeveloped and formal monitoring of all aspects of teaching by the head of department is not established.

107. Since the previous inspection the department has made some good progress. Teaching has improved but the range of teaching methods is still narrow. ICT is used insufficiently and topical mathematical problems do not feature enough in lessons. Nevertheless, overall the department provides good value for money.

109. **Science**

108. In the end of Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests in 1999, students' results were very high when compared with all schools and match those of similar schools. Over the past four years the levels of attainment have been maintained. In the GCSE examinations in 1999, all pupils taking biology and chemistry obtained A*-C grades and nearly all of those taking physics obtained A*-C grades. Dual award candidates mostly obtained A*-C grades. All science pupils obtained A*-G grades. The proportion of pupils obtaining the higher grades of A* and A in the sciences is high, and standards have risen since the last inspection. In the GCE A level examinations, students perform above average when compared with national point scores.

109. By the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is well above average. Higher attaining pupils have a very good understanding of scientific concepts. For example, they explain very well their knowledge of static electricity in terms of electrons, they apply their knowledge of chemistry effectively to balance equations. They distinguish compounds from mixtures accurately in terms of particles. Lower attaining students have a sound basic knowledge of a wide range of topics, for example they know the scientific names of the nutrients found in food, and that they are broken down in the digestive system. They write simple accurate equations to represent reactions such as that between magnesium and hydrochloric acid.

110. By the end of Key Stage 4 attainment, across all the science courses, is well above average. Pupils' research skills and investigative skill are very good. Higher attaining pupils have very good understanding of work done, and are working beyond GCSE level in a number of topics, for example in developing their understanding of hormonal control of the body and of how enzymes work. They demonstrate advanced skills of interpretation and evaluation of practical work. Lower attaining students interpret graphs less thoroughly and have more difficulty in recognising relationships, but plan experiments fairly and relate their planning to their scientific knowledge.

111. Attainment by the end of Year 13 is above average in all the sciences when compared with national point scores, with the exception of human biology where attainment is below. Sixth formers in all the A level sciences show a good grasp of subject knowledge. Higher attaining students in chemistry demonstrate and discuss aspects of carbon chemistry with much skill and accuracy. Average attaining students in physics set up circuits competently to investigate the properties of capacitors and carry out appropriate calculations correctly. Higher attaining students in biology can make intelligent and informed observations on the structure of the heart, skilfully relating structure to function, whilst lower attaining students in human biology show a clear understanding of the nature of a nervous impulse. Practical investigations are of a very high standard, the best often using ICT to present their work. Predictions are very thoroughly related to advanced scientific theory. Results are very thoroughly evaluated and areas of error are targeted for improved accuracy in future work.

112.All pupils make very good progress at Key Stage 3. There are substantial gains in knowledge, understanding and investigation skills. By the end of Year 9, investigation skills are very good with pupils planning experiments with several factors involved, taking readings and making observations. Results in the national Key Stage 3 tests show that students perform much better than might be expected from the results of standardised tests carried out at the beginning of Year 7. Very good progress was seen in one Year 7 class where a range of activities provided students with the opportunity to use ICT, textbooks and games to extend their learning and consolidation, and develop the skills of working independently.

113.Throughout Key Stage 4, progress continues to be good. The results profile of all the science subjects indicates that pupils are performing better than might be expected from the Key Stage 3 tests. Specially designed self-study units effectively support students in consolidating previous work and in developing further skills of independent learning. Progress is good in investigation work, and for example, pupils use their chemical knowledge effectively in exploring the effects of concentration of acid on the rate of reaction with limestone. Progress of the small number of pupils with special educational needs is very good. These students are very effectively supported, especially in practical classes, by technical staff.

114.Progress in Years 12 and 13 is good. There is a significant increase in depth and breadth of knowledge and students further develop their research and investigative skills. Progress is supported considerably by effective individual attention given by teachers both in and beyond classroom time. In one small Year 13 human biology class, students developed a sound understanding of the complex process of neurotransmission through the use of a very good teacher-made model and through very effective tutorial-style teaching.

115.Attitudes in science throughout the school are good and play an effective part in the progress made by students. They are attentive to teachers, sustain concentration throughout lessons, and make good use of their time in the classroom. They are very well behaved and carry out practical work sensibly and efficiently with due regard for safety. They work quietly on their own and collaboratively in pairs or groups. They are respectful towards teachers and towards each other. Exercise books, homework and class notes are extremely well presented and are very good revision resources. They are an indicator of the pride students take in their work and their keenness to do well. Outside the classroom, progress is supported by their good use of books and ICT.

116.Teaching is good overall. It is never less than satisfactory and in three-quarters of lessons is better than satisfactory. Over a third of lessons are very good. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject material at all levels. Lessons are well planned and high expectations are matched to the attainment levels of the students. Investigative work is particularly well planned and very good support from teachers makes an important contribution to the high standards achieved. Although single lessons are limited by the short amount of time available, teachers maintain an efficient pace that ensures progress takes place. Assessment is frequent and well structured and the targeting of additional support for a significant number of pupils is helping to raise standards. Relevant homework is given regularly and is often challenging. At Key Stages 3 and 4, the quality of marking is inconsistent, the best providing clear indication of what pupils have attained and what they need to do to make further progress. However, marking is generally unstructured and rarely indicates attainment. A very wide range of extracurricular activities, including a popular science club for Year 7, extends learning and provides useful links with industry. Much attention is given to safe practice during practical lessons and teaching is very well supported throughout the school by a team of very highly valued technicians.

117.The subject is managed well by the three heads of department who meet regularly. There is clear educational direction for the subject that is highly focused on progress and achievement. There is thorough analysis of public examination results, and the curriculum and teaching methods are appropriately modified in response to the analysis and findings. At Key Stage 3, however, there is no ongoing collation of test results in science between the individual departments. Although some staff appraisal is taking place, teaching is not formally evaluated. Although some targets for science have been included in the school development plan, the science section does not have a structured development plan that is systematically evaluated.

118.Since the last inspection, there has been some sharing of good practice within each of the sciences but little across the departments. ICT is now being incorporated into teaching in all year groups and the recent acquisition of very good resources is giving potential for even further development. There is more coordination between the three departments; relationships are good and there is more sharing of ideas. However, there is still a lack of standardisation in a number of areas. Comments concerning the lack of advanced mathematics skills by the A level physics students no longer pertain to the same extent, principally because of changes to the physics examination syllabus. Students not studying A level mathematics are effectively supported with extra mathematics lessons.

120. OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES

120. Art

119. In the Key Stage 3 teacher assessments in 1999, the majority of pupils were working above the national expectation. For the past three years the GCSE results for grades A*-C have been well above the national averages and in 1999 all pupils gained grades within the A*-D range. The A level results over the same period have consistently been above the national averages with all students in 1999 achieving grades A-E and the majority of pupils gaining the higher grades of A or B.

120. Attainment for the majority of pupils by the end of Key Stage 3 is above the standard expected nationally. By the age of 14, pupils draw and paint abstract ideas confidently, and develop them in two and three dimensions. Colour is sensitively handled and texture is used effectively. Pupils have good knowledge of the work of famous artists and art movements. They use technical vocabulary appropriately and empathise with the work of artists such as Morris, Moore and Monet, producing work in similar styles.

121. By the end of Key Stage 4, their attainment is well above national expectations. This applies to drawing, painting, textiles and their knowledge and understanding about artists and the influence of other cultures on the work. By the age of 16, there is evidence of thorough and extended research, as well as an increased capacity for independent learning and experimentation in the pursuit of originality. Observational drawing is particularly strong in this key stage, with large-scale studies resulting from the work inspired by prominent local buildings and the sculptures of Michelangelo.

122. In the sixth form, students' attainment is also well above expectations for the course. It is also above expectations for creativity and independent approaches to art work, with students more able to set personal targets. Powerful and moving images emanating from their considerations of the writings of the war poets and the significance of the war memorial, as well as the highly imaginative mixed media textile creations inspired by architectural themes, are some of the very impressive achievements of students.

123. Pupils make good progress in technical skills at Key Stage 3 and very good progress in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Progress in understanding of art related ideas, is good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Skills develop well as pupils increase their experience, as do their interpretations of work set and use of a range of styles to enrich their own work. Pupils enter Year 7 having had different experiences of the subject and no data is available to indicate entry standards in art. They soon develop a good range of investigative and making skills, the result of good teaching and planning.

124. Progress at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is more marked and is the result of a consolidation of skills based on prior knowledge and experience. There is considerable progress in terms of pupils' confidence in their own abilities, in ambition and scale of work, in complexity of design, originality of concept and the range of skills needed to achieve the desired outcomes. Progress is further aided by a variety of diagnostic assessment procedures which identify strengths and help pupils to focus on areas for improvement. This is particularly effective in the sixth form where highly individual creative styles emerge. A strong emphasis on the development of drawing skills and on the importance and value of research and independent learning aid pupils' and students' progress further. Pupils with special needs are very well integrated into the work of the department and make good progress at both key stages.

125. Pupils' behaviour and attitude to work are good overall and often very good. Pupils settle very quickly to work. The effects of increased self-motivation and sustained concentration is more marked at Key Stage 4 and impressive in the sixth form. Pupils are courteous to each other and to teachers. As they move through the key stages, pupils show increasing confidence and clarity of thought when talking about their work, its origins and development. They take pride in their levels of progress, the high quality of presentation of work, and there is a growth in commitment to homework, personal research and overtime in the department during the lunchtimes. They work well together and take a mature interest in each other's work. They speak very enthusiastically and appreciatively about the art department, its ethos for learning and the high standards it has enabled them to achieve.

126. The quality of teaching is good overall. About half is good and about one-third is very good, with a small amount excellent, and a small amount satisfactory. Teachers have a very good subject knowledge, expertise and understanding which they relate well to pupils' needs. They are enthusiastic and make a good team, with complementary skills and experience. There are high expectations in terms of the quality, output and pace of

work, although deadlines and objectives are not always made clear to pupils. Where they are shared with pupils, progress and quality of work are good. The use of assessment to inform learning, with regular, informative, oral and written comments, as well as target setting and individual action plans for sixth form students, is very effective and contributes to the very good examination results achieved. Assessment also informs the pupils' school reports and curriculum development in the department. The variety of materials and experiences provided gives breadth and depth to the art curriculum.

127.Planning is good, with imaginative schemes of work for all year groups and increasingly challenging tasks, but planned opportunities for computer aided design, as part of the taught courses, have not been sufficiently developed. Whilst the department strongly acknowledges the value of the spiritual aspect of art education as part of personal development, and pursues this to some extent, opportunities are not clearly documented.

128.The department is well led by an enthusiastic, sensitive and hard working specialist who has the vision and the commitment to achieve high standards. Teaching is evaluated informally through class visits and formally in department meetings. The head of department is supported by well qualified and experienced staff who work well together. A vibrant and stimulating working environment has been established in which creative thinking and high levels of achievement flourish. The subject has a development plan, but targets are vague and show no costings or individual responsibilities. Accommodation and resources are very good, with generous, open plan, specialist provision. Extracurricular activities, such as visits to Liverpool and London galleries, the Yorkshire Sculpture Park and the recent trip to Rome for sixth form students, raise expectations and extend knowledge and understanding effectively. There are very impressive displays of work in the department and in the public areas of the school.

129.The department has made good progress in addressing issues raised in the last inspection. Statutory requirements are met, although facilities for ICT within the department have not yet been improved.

131. **Business education**

130.In the GCSE examination in 1999, all pupils obtained A*-C grades in business studies. This is well above average in relation to similar schools nationally and continues the high standards of previous years which were also well above average. Candidates obtained fewer A* grades than they did in their other subjects, but attainment has risen substantially since the last inspection.

131. At the end of Year 13 attainment is above average in relation to other selective schools nationally. The proportion of candidates achieving overall success in the highest grade bands in the 1999 Nuffield Economics with Business A level examination increased over the past two years. For many individual candidates results are consistent with their performance in their other A level subjects and constitute considerable added value to their GCSE grades.

132.Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is above average. Pupils have a very good understanding of business vocabulary for example when querying whether a market niche exists during class discussions on the location of business. They have a very good knowledge of business finance and a very good understanding of the laws of supply and demand. They apply their knowledge and skills very effectively in a range of activities, confidently applying socioeconomic factors when analysing target markets, or sales figures. The highest attaining pupils have an excellent understanding of, and ability to use appropriately, graphs depicting demand shifts or price setting theories, and financial analyses including ratios. Lower attaining pupils demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of business concepts and practice, and apply appropriate terminology to all aspects of the syllabus.

133.Sixth form students are very confident in using specialist vocabulary, are unhesitating in responding to teachers' questions, effectively challenge each other's ideas, for example when drawing attention to contradictions in other groups' business plans during a class activity. They have a very good knowledge of aggregate supply curves, and incorporate earlier learning such as the marketing mix or just-in-time stock control strategies into more advanced work. They explain well how raising interest rates would dampen demand, understand the structure of the UK economy, and make articulate observations during class discussions for example when considering agricultural protectionism or international trade. Students make individual notes competently, using their skills with ICT to good advantage

134.Progress is good, and often very good, in both key stages. In Key Stage 4, pupils increase their knowledge each lesson and over time, for example when extending knowledge of economies and diseconomies of scale by

examining monopoly policies. They understand the various sources of finance available to aid the expansion of business, and express opinions and ideas with confidence such as when considering primary and secondary research strategies or explaining the ways in which fixed and variable costs might affect business decisions. In the sixth form, students show very good progress in the ease of use of specialist vocabulary, the manner in which they synthesise earlier learning through discussion and argument, and acquisition of an impressive grasp of current topics, such as the UK and European economies.

135. In Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, the response of learners is very good, and often excellent. The pupils and students are quick to settle into lessons, are cooperative and focused, working collaboratively or individually as is required of them, with no wasted time. They are confident during question and answer sessions, but listen attentively to each others' responses. In pupils' and students' files, work is well organised, and frequently presented to a high standard.

136. The quality of teaching is very good, with many excellent features in both key stages. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and particular expertise in the financial aspects of the syllabuses, together with tangible enthusiasm for their specialism. Lesson and course planning are very good, with good pace and well structured tasks to make the maximum use of the comparatively short lesson periods. Since the last inspection report, the range of teaching methods and organisational strategies has been broadened to include good pace, excellent questioning to extend the thinking of the higher attaining pupils, and preparation of teaching materials to suit the needs of all pupils and students. As a result the quality of teaching is a major contributory factor in the attainment of students, particularly in the sixth form. Homework frequently involves students in selecting, and analysing, items from current business news, which are then examined thoroughly in class. Teachers communicate their high expectations of learners across the whole ability range and provide a supportive framework to which students respond. Students are encouraged to develop their initial written and oral answers, to question, challenge and continually strive for the highest standards. They respond to their teachers' high expectations of them, by preparing homework tasks, classroom activities or longer-term essays diligently. Work is assessed thoroughly and constructively at both key stages, with appropriate diagnostic and formative comments, commensurate with examining board standards. A strength of the department is the planned progression made possible by the same team teaching in both GCSE and A level classes.

137. The department is well managed and strengths of the team well coordinated. Curricular decisions are taken after careful consideration of what constitutes best practice for these particular students, as a result of which syllabuses have been changed since the last inspection with a resultant good effect on attainment. That report drew attention to the need for broadening an over-didactic teaching style. This has been addressed most satisfactorily with the identification of effective teaching methods and inclusion of them in planning. Sixth form students in particular are taking responsibility for their own learning, a process begun in Key Stage 4. Staff are in constant communication both in terms of best practice in the classroom, shared resources, and in discussing students' progress or identifying problems. The changes planned for Curriculum 2000 are seen as a welcome opportunity to consolidate further these developments in the department.

138. The accommodation used for business lessons does present some problems, with the lack of a specialist suite or base room. These difficulties fragment display areas, resources and interaction between year groups as well as between parallel sets. The present accommodation is suitable for numbers taking the subject now. The department uses the available space effectively and efficiently, although there are some restrictions on the type of classroom activity which can take place such as that necessitating rearrangement of furniture, or movement between working groups.

140. **Drama**

139. Attainment in drama in Key Stage 3 is appropriate and provides a firm foundation for pupils following the subject at Key Stage 4. (There are no national tests or levels at Key Stage 3.) Attainment at Key Stage 4, however, has been high over recent years. Results for GCSE Drama have been well above the national average for all schools and similar schools in recent years. Attainment by the end of Year 13 in 1999 was well above national average, as seen in the results for A level theatre studies, but was even higher in the previous year.

140. Progress at Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. Year 7 pupils quickly adjust to the subject's demands, and acquire confidence in their approach to the subject. They bring a lively imagination to lessons and show enthusiasm. However, the gap between each block of drama lessons interrupts their progress and this results in satisfactory rather than good progress.

141. In Key Stage 4, the picture changes rapidly because progress is very good. Pupils begin their GCSE course with a good knowledge of British dramatic traditions, which is a sound basis for their studies. By the end of the key stage they consider the merits and defects in their own work and that of others, and show sensitivity towards other people's feelings. A strength of their drama is an awareness of how initial ideas develop through modification. This shows through well in their portrayal of character. Social development is very good in drama, an example of which was seen in the positive way in which some Year 10 pupils worked with pupils with special educational needs from another school. Sixth form students work well together while having independence as thinkers and performers. They are committed to drama, and the highest attaining students write essays of considered argument and insight.

142. Teaching in drama is good in Key Stage 3, and very good overall in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. This very effective teaching is the key to pupils' very good progress in examination courses. The use of self-evaluation, individual research and good teacher explanation and example of how to use the voice promotes independence as learners, and very good subject knowledge. Teaching prompts rather than directs. Drama enhances attainment in English and considerably enriches the cultural life of the school.

144. **Design and technology**

143. In the end of Key Stage 3 teachers' assessments of pupils' attainment was well above average, a position held over the past three years. Teachers' assessments results match those of pupils in similar schools. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C in the 1999 GCSE examinations was well above the national average, maintaining the pattern of the past three years. The number of pupils achieving grades A*-G is well above the national average.

144. Evidence from the inspection shows that the attainment of pupils by the end of Key Stage 3 is well above national expectations. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils have a very good understanding of designing and ways of presenting their work to communicate their ideas for designs. Pupils have a good understanding of the working characteristics of a range of materials and how to use tools safely and accurately. The quality of finished products demonstrates an attention to detail, accuracy and precision. When making a jigsaw puzzle, pupils fit their design to very specific needs, select suitable materials and use construction processes confidently and with some accuracy. In textiles, pupils' demonstrate some excellent technical skills, contributing to high quality products as seen for example in a project on designing and making a pencil case. In food technology pupils make cakes, bake bread, make sauces and evaluate different types of manufactured food products to a high standard. Pupils make decisions effectively about suitable ingredients and have a good understanding of what constitutes a healthy balanced diet. In graphics lessons they develop an understanding of presenting drawings and designs in different ways as, for instance, during the lesson-perspective drawing. By the end of Key Stage 3 they have also acquired a very good knowledge and understanding of mechanisms, structures and control systems.

145. The overall attainment of pupils by the end of Key Stage 4 is well above the national average. From the evidence of pupils' design work and practical projects, their attainment reflects the GCSE examination results. Pupils design and make packaging for different products and use mechanisms and control systems to solve problems to a very high standard, in for example, a project for an electronic door opening system. In graphics lessons they design and produce detailed models for an interior design project. They prepare imaginative snack meals using a variety of basic ingredients. They can design and make items of clothing in textiles using different materials and original ideas. Current work with resistant materials, graphics, textiles and food technology is of a high standard with pupils paying particular attention to producing accurate finished products. In their design work, a significant number have a high level of understanding of construction techniques and presentation of work is very good. Pupils develop design briefs for their projects and communicate their ideas well verbally, graphically and in writing. Pupils use control technology and computer aided design effectively in their projects.

146. The overall attainment in the sixth form meets course expectations. Their designs provide sufficient detail and they make informed decisions on the choice of ideas for their designs. They give detailed consideration to form, function and style. Their design work shows attention to accuracy and they work to a rigorous specification.

147. All pupils make good progress in Key Stage 3. Their knowledge of design technology increases steadily because they have opportunities to solve problems and work independently or in groups to develop their practical and design skills and their skills of investigation and research. Their skills in designing and making

develop well through a range of activities in resistant materials, textiles, electronics, graphics and food technology. In a lesson on making bread rolls, for example, pupils made very good progress because the briefing provided clear instructions, pupils were encouraged to take responsibility for particular tasks within their groups, and time limits were set.

148. Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 4. Their knowledge of designing and making improves steadily because pupils consolidate their learning satisfactorily and build on their skills of designing, their practical competence to solve more complex problems of design, and their knowledge of food preparation. They know how their work is assessed and quickly learn how to judge their standards and how to improve. Their practical skills develop through the high demand of work and the range of projects provided. For example, designing a shop front in graphics, making a desk tidy using vacuum formed plastic and manufacturing a food product for special dietary needs ensures that pupils practice skills learned earlier and apply them to a real-life context. All pupils make similar progress.

149. Students make good progress in the sixth form. As part of the course in fabrics and design, they develop their skills well and improve their techniques in the design and manufacture of good quality garments. When making a fleece jacket they use individual design effectively and when designing and making a two-piece suit good consideration is given to individual style and function. When working on major projects using resistant materials pupils develop good skills in designing, fabricating and machining using a range of tools and materials.

150. The behaviour of pupils and students, and their attitudes to learning are always good. They are interested in their work and maintain good levels of concentration to work to their best standards. They listen attentively and watch carefully to understand what they must do and show pride in their achievements. They respond well to teachers and work reliably without close supervision. They take responsibility for their areas of work and in organising their tasks. They remain on task, they are particularly keen on practical work. They persevere and take pride in their work. They carry out research and investigation for their projects in school and in their own time. Pupils are always polite courteous and well behaved. They show a respect for their surroundings and the fabric of the school. They appreciate the resources available in lessons. Very good relationships with teachers, adults and with each other. They work cooperatively and collaboratively when required. They have a respect for each other and show consideration of other people's values and beliefs.

151. Teaching in design and technology is good in all of the lessons observed at each key stage and in the sixth form. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject, plan well to ensure that lessons have suitable pace. They are competent in teaching the programmes of study, plan activities well and draw on a range of contexts and resources to make subject knowledge understandable. Teachers provide challenging and stimulating activities that are appealing to all pupils, teaching is matched to pupils' stage of learning and moves them on. Teachers make clear the importance of application, accuracy and good presentation. Lessons have clear short-term objectives and are well planned, with careful attention paid to the sequence of activities, which contributes to a good pace. Teachers plan effectively, set out clear objectives and teaching intentions within a sequence of lessons. Planning sets out what pupils will do and the resources they will need. The needs of pupils working at different rates are considered effectively. Teachers employ a variety of approaches – exposition, explanation, demonstration, discussion, investigation, problem solving and practical activities. They are effective in extending pupils' knowledge, understanding and developing their skills. Homework reinforces what is taught in lessons. Practical activities are well organised and the supervision of lessons effective, with appropriate interventions to support and sustain individuals pupils' learning and maintain appropriate expectation. Work is sufficiently linked to the requirements of the National Curriculum. Teachers' expectations of pupils' performance are high. Good use is made of resources to teach computer aided design and the use of computer control.

152. Pupils' work is assessed regularly and teachers give helpful oral and written comments. Assessment concentrates upon tracking experiences and outcomes and is used to inform what pupils need to do to improve their work. There is use of day-to-day assessment to inform planning of subsequent lessons and their own teaching.

153. The leadership and the management of the department are good, with a clear vision and direction leading to effective strategies to promote curricular improvements. There are a number of practical workshop clubs which take place during lunchtimes, encouraging pupils' interest in the subject. The department has also established industrial links which provide good opportunities for visits, joint projects and work experience that enhance the experiences of those pupils taking GCSE courses and those in the sixth form. There are no design

and technology activities related to different cultures, particularly through food technology and textiles. The department development plans do not include any costings, responsibilities and a time line. At present there is no formal review of teaching and learning or the sharing of good practice. There has been an improvement in teaching since the last inspection. Targets have been set to improve the GCSE A*- A pass rate in resistant materials.

154. Accommodation is generous and there is a good level of resources and equipment available. The resources available for newer technologies and ICT provide coverage of the programmes of study and provide further opportunities for pupils to reach high standards in the subject. The technician staff make a significant contribution to the organisation of the department.

156. **Geography**

155. In the Key Stage 3 teacher assessments in 1999, the majority of pupils reached levels of attainment that were well above the national expectations. The percentage of pupils who gained those levels rose from 1998. Similar standards were seen among present pupils in Year 9. In the GCSE examinations in 1999, the proportion of pupils obtaining A*-C grades was well above average, continuing the pattern of recent years. The present Year 11 is attaining similar standards. In the A level examinations in 1999, the proportion of students obtaining A and B grades was lower than in recent years because there was some misunderstanding of examination instructions, an issue the school is in debate over with the examination board. Nevertheless, nearly all students obtained an A level in the subject, a standard that has been maintained over recent years.

156. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 is well above average. Pupils have a very good knowledge of place, through their study of the local environment and countries outside the United Kingdom. They clearly explain how many factors influence decisions about places. For example, they explained the benefits and problems of tourism in Kenya well. They understand that tourism brings in finance, but at a price to wildlife and the environment. Pupils also have a very good understanding of physical processes, such as river flow, and explain how people can reduce the chance of flooding by planting trees. Pupils recognise that people's actions may have environmental consequences, for example, that the high usage of cars in Los Angeles is a contributory factor in the weather conditions experienced there.

157. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is well above average. Pupils understand settlement models and apply these to places studied. For example, in their study of the small village of Moreton, they clearly explained that the centre had low order shops that served the people in the locality. Pupils use the demographic transition model to explain changes in cities in the United Kingdom and, for example, that there are push factors in the form of unemployment and poor housing. Through the study of the Buyker scheme in Newcastle upon Tyne, they understand that the quality of the environment can be improved.

158. Attainment by the end of Year 13 is well above average. Students understand theories, for example, of the causes of changes in temperature that resulted in the ice age, and the current theory of ice movement. They have a very clear understanding of the way that economic and social change can lead to political change, particularly with reference to inner cities. Their understanding of urban regeneration is explained effectively through reference to the Hamilton quarter initiative in Birkenhead. Students also have a very good understanding of coastal management, learned through reference to Ainsdale and Formby. They also appreciate that views on urban landscapes arise from changes in attitudes and values, and they used areas studied, such as Chester, to explain these.

159. Progress overall at Key Stage 3 is very good. Pupils enter the school with a sound level of understanding and skills. They make very good progress in gaining knowledge, which is often advanced for pupils at this stage, and in mapwork and data handling skills. Pupils also develop good research skills, and these are well used, for example, pupils gathered information about Kenya from a wide range of written, photographic and map evidence. However, fieldwork is only experienced in Year 7, which results in a lack of progression, and inadequate experience for pupils who do not continue with geography beyond Key Stage 3. Pupils also quickly gain a good knowledge of geographical vocabulary, such as terms associated with settlements. This enables pupils to find information and contributes to their progress.

160. Progress at Key Stage 4 is also very good. Pupils gain detailed knowledge of the topics covered in the syllabus. For example, they recognise that while hill farmers are suffering economic difficulties, there are alternative ways of solving the situation, such as diversification in the use of marginal land. Research skills are very well developed, and evident in the coursework on Moreton village, with pupils formulating hypotheses,

collecting relevant data, presenting it in an appropriate way, and analysing it to make valid conclusions. For example, pupils created accurate choropleth maps to show the density of pedestrians in the town.

161. Progress in Years 12 and 13 is also very good. This applies particularly to fieldwork and associated skills in collecting, recording and analysing data. For example, the study of Cwm Idwal and calculating the angularity of fragments of rock, and testing a hypothesis that the angularity of fragments decreases down a scree slope, made a significant contribution to students' analytical skills. Students make progress in understanding models, such as that used to show the mechanisms of sea level change.

162. Attitudes to learning are very positive. Pupils are interested in geography, and this shows in the high take up rate at A level, and the numbers that study the subject in higher education. They work well together and when working outside the classroom they show high levels of responsibility and personal initiative, for example, when researching information on natural hazards and again when preparing materials to make a presentation on the choice of a new site for tourists in Spain. Pupils and students take great care with the presentation of their work, for example, when making traffic flow maps.

163. Teaching is very good overall, and never less than good. In three-quarters of lessons teaching is very good, and all teaching at A level is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, and they plan well so that much is covered in the lesson. The very good lessons are conducted at a brisk rate, and no time is wasted. Very good questioning is used which makes pupils think, for example, about the rights and consequences of interfering with nature when areas of deposition are under threat. Resources are very good and used effectively. For example, a video of the news items of the cyclone at Orissa was successfully used to give impact to the study of hazards. Also high quality reproductions were used to show the present and proposed urban landscape. Teachers have very high expectations, and the content of lessons is frequently very challenging. For example, pupils in Key Stage 3 are taught the complexities of the transitional demographic model when studying population. They develop a very good, detailed understanding and this is a contributory factor to the high levels achieved. Homework is used well. It is matched to the needs of all pupils and in particular, it extends the higher attaining pupils. In addition, the very good diagnostic marking, particularly at A level, has contributed to the high standards achieved. Above all, the enthusiasm of the teachers transmits itself well to the pupils.

164. A committed head of department leads a strong team. The National Curriculum is well covered at Key Stage 3, with the exception of fieldwork in Years 8 and 9. The additional content from the Key Stage 4 curriculum is planned well into the Key Stage 3 materials to help pupils reach high levels of attainment. The modules that are studied at A level use the strengths of the understanding of the individual teachers, which contributes to the high standards achieved. Assessment is good, with cross moderation of assignments in year 9, a good practice which ensures comparability. Results are thoroughly analysed and the information acquired is then used to guide future planning levels of attainment. Ideas are shared amongst staff who teach the same elements, which disseminates good practice. The bridging project with primary schools has led to continuity of subject matter into Key Stage 3. The accommodation has improved since the time of the last report. Geography is now taught in the specialist or the humanities rooms for Key Stages 3 and 4, which allows resources to be accessible. Resources are sufficient to deliver the curriculum. However, the absence of computers in the department prevents the use of ICT as an immediate teaching aid, although pupils are encouraged to use it for research, and some use it well. Geography contributes to pupils' moral development through the study of issues, such as those associated with the environment. It also contributes to pupils' social development when they undertake fieldwork outside the school. Pupils are also made aware of other places and cultures, such as the multiethnic nature of cities such as Los Angeles.

166. **History**

165. In teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, attainment well exceeded national expectations, the majority of pupils reached a standard between National Curriculum Levels 7 and 8 and some achieved a level of Exceptional Performance. In the 1999 GCSE examination 99 per cent of pupils obtained grades A*-C and 100 per cent achieved Grades A-G. The GCSE examination results have shown a steady improvement over the last three years. Results in history are significantly better than in selective schools nationally and better than those for similar subjects in the school. In the 1999 history A level examinations just under half the students were awarded Grades A or B. This is less than in previous years but well above the national average.

166. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 is above average. Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of the main events from the Roman occupation of Britain to the twentieth century. They understand about events leading to the Norman Conquest, the qualities and skills needed by a monarch; something of the causes

and effects of historical changes and the relative value of different historical sources. They extract and evaluate from primary and secondary sources such as texts and pictures very well, and organise it and present it in a structured way.

167. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is above average. Pupils following the GCSE social and economic or modern world syllabuses gain a good knowledge and understanding of the reasons for social, economic and political changes such as the growth of anti-Semitism in Europe, the role of women in society and the causes and effects of world wars. Pupils use knowledge gained earlier very well and place events in context accurately, interpret information well, discuss and analyse evidence and make valid historical deductions from source material.

168. Attainment by the end of Year 13 is above average. Students can assimilate large amounts of information from a variety of sources. Many make links across periods and topics, analyse statistical evidence and most successfully organise and plan pieces of extended writing.

169. Progress at Key Stage 3 is good. Pupils increase the range and depth of historical knowledge very well and develop their communication skills in speaking and writing well. Their increase in understanding of chronology and how to use a range of sources is good. Progress at Key Stage 4 is good. By the end of Key Stage 4, pupils have progressed well in their ability to handle difficult concepts, for example, the causes of racism and anti-Semitism, and understanding complex reasons why men were prepared to enlist in the army in World War I.

170. Progress in Years 12 and 13 is good. Students following the social and economic syllabus build on previous knowledge and understanding gained in Key Stage 4 considerably. They move beyond understanding of factual information to develop higher level skills such as evaluating the reliability of their sources of information and to use a wide range of information to carry out research.

171. Pupils' and students' attitudes are good. Behaviour is exemplary and pupils and students form constructive relationships with each other and their teachers. Pupils take responsibility for their own learning when working alone or in groups and show real initiative and responsibility especially when carrying out self-assessment and review of their progress. Pupils use resources well and many use the Internet or CD-ROM in the school library or at home effectively to aid their research.

172. The quality of teaching is good overall and never less than satisfactory. In more than a quarter of lessons it is very good. Teachers have excellent knowledge and understanding of history and this is significant in the good quality of explanation, description and questioning in lessons. Lessons are well planned with suitably demanding work and high expectations of standards of effort and behaviour. Good use is made of resources including primary and secondary sources. Fieldwork and visits to sites of historic interest are used effectively to provide first hand knowledge and experience that contribute well to the high standards achieved by pupils. Work is regularly marked and helpful comments provided. Although ICT is used in homework, insufficient use is made in lessons.

173. The subject is managed very well. Teaching is evaluated and the history department plans its work very well. The history curriculum makes a valuable contribution to the moral, social and cultural development of pupils. Assessment follows clear procedures and contributes to raising standards, although opportunities for self-assessment by pupils are relatively infrequent. Teachers are well qualified and there are sufficient textbooks to meet the needs of pupils but there are insufficient historical artefacts and access to the ICT facilities limits its use to support teaching.

174. Since the last inspection the attainment and rate of progress of pupils at Key Stage 3 has improved and GCE A level results are now well above the national average. Pupils take greater responsibility for their own learning and have some opportunities for the assessment of their own performance. Teachers work well together and share good practice.

176. **Information and communication technology (ICT)**

175. In the end of the Key Stage 3 teachers' assessments in 1999, pupils' attainment was well above expectations and maintains the pattern of the past three years. The proportion of pupils gaining grades A*-C in the 1999 GCSE examination was well above the national average and has risen over the past three years. The proportion of pupils achieving grades A*-G was above the national average.

176.The attainment of pupils by the end of Key Stage 3 is well above average overall and for some pupils is extremely high. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils work at a high level when manipulating text, integrating text and images, analysing spreadsheets, using a database and using control systems.

177.The overall attainment of pupils by the end of Key Stage 4 is above average. Pupils work effectively through projects based on the analysis of a problem and establishing the use of systems to match specific criteria. Pupils use spreadsheets, databases, desktop publishing and word processing in a wide range of tasks very well. Pupils work well on setting out specific tasks to be completed for projects, testing and evaluating the system with considerable skill. In science lessons, pupils use sensing and data logging equipment well and in mathematics lessons they use graphic calculators competently to solve problems, both of which support work done in ICT lessons effectively. The standard of work is often well above average.

178.Pupils make good progress in Key Stage 3. Their knowledge increases steadily because they make gains in and consolidate skills and techniques across the key stage. Their skills in the use of word processing, spreadsheets, databases and desktop publishing develop through the use of ICT in a variety of contexts. For example, they use cut-and-paste procedures, introduce headers and footers to text and transfer images into documents skilfully. They can save and retrieve and print information through well planned practice. When using spreadsheets, pupils enter data and follow instructions accurately to modify presentation, and use the appropriate formula carefully to arrive at solutions. There is similar progress across all strands of the programmes of study. Pupils make good progress in the use of computers in design technology to programme robots and mechanical systems. For example, in a lesson on systems and control, pupils devised effective programs to open and close doors automatically, operate a lift which stopped at different levels and control a forklift truck.

179.Pupils make good progress in GCSE lessons at Key Stage 4. Their knowledge increases steadily because there are opportunities to consolidate skills, techniques and understanding across the key stage Their skills in the use of word processing, desktop publishing, spreadsheets and databases develop through well planned activities. For example, pupils use spreadsheets well to enter payroll details, carry out salary calculations, change salary formulae and recalculate the payroll. Pupils make good progress with the use of computers in other subjects and in particular in science where they carry out experiments using sensing and data logging equipment to support GCSE work, in mathematics where they use graphic calculators and in design technology for computer aided design. In business studies they use spreadsheets, databases and word processing effectively to complete assignments.

180.Pupils' folders are well organised and pupils take great pride in their work. Pupils use their own initiative to develop learning, investigations, problem-solving skills, and to use the Internet. They respond well to teachers' guidance and instructions and corrections are carried out fully. Pupils concentrate well, and particularly so in practical work. They behave well at all times, show respect for the equipment they use and work well with each other and teachers. They support each other and are willing to take responsibility.

181.Teaching is good overall. Teachers' subject knowledge is good which enables them to plan a wide range of activities, draw on a range of contexts and resources to make the subject understandable. Teachers use a wide range of tasks covering word processing, use of text and graphics, clip art, scanned images and digital cameras which effectively support project work pupils eventually meet when following the examination syllabus. Teachers have high expectations and lessons provide suitable stimulus and challenge to meet the needs of all pupils. They use appropriate intervention to help pupils understand what they need to do to improve their work and make progress. The importance of accuracy and good presentation of work are well stressed. Marking is regular throughout, but at Key Stage 3 it is limited mainly to ticks without consistent constructive feedback. At Key Stage 4, teachers provide valuable written comments and feedback designed to help pupils make further progress. Teachers use their own records of day-to-day assessment effectively to inform planning of subsequent lessons. Homework is used well to reinforce and extend what is learned in class, and at Key Stage 4 is used effectively to support work for the examination course. The pace of work is generally brisk, with appropriate opportunities for reflection and consolidation of material covered.

182.The subject is well led, with good organisation and management and a clear vision for future development. There is an effective learning environment, commitment to high achievement, good relationships and provision for equality of access for all pupils. The subject is a key area for development in the school development plan for 1998–1999 and the department is preparing well for this. Improvements since the last inspection include improved pupil access to the subject and improved teacher interaction and commitment. There is a comprehensive scheme of work and effective evaluation of pupil attainment and progress in taught ICT lessons.

There is an appropriate number of computers in the three computer rooms and computers are also available in the library, science, and design and technology departments. Pupils also have access to printers, scanners and digital cameras, although there is insufficient control over access to the Internet. Pupils have established links with schools in France and Germany via video conferencing which contributes to the wide range of experiences they acquire in the subject.

183. ICT skills are generally satisfactory and are developed effectively in most subjects. ICT is used regularly in science for sensing and data logging, design technology for computer control and computer aided design. In mathematics pupils use graphic calculators and in English they use word processing and desktop publishing. In business studies, pupils and students use spreadsheets and databases in assignments. Although ICT is an element of all subjects, but for example, in some mathematics classes and in modern foreign languages there is inconsistent use between classes in the same year. In music there is only one midi-system to help pupils with composition. There has been satisfactory progress overall since the last inspection although monitoring of provision is not systematic enough to ensure all pupils receive similar experiences. The school development plan is not clear about how ICT will be developed and supported in other subjects.

185. **Modern foreign languages**

184. Teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 indicate that attainment in modern foreign languages was above the national average in 1997 to 1999. Results in GCSE for 1997 to 1999 remain consistently very high and well above national averages and averages for grammar schools. Pupils attain well above average in the highest grades. Every pupil is entered for at least one modern foreign language, and a very large proportion of pupils enter for two. Numbers entered for Spanish, a recently introduced language, are substantial. A level results in 1999 were well above the national average and similar in 1998. The attainment of the small number of pupils who study A/S and other GCSE languages in the sixth form is well above the national average. At Key Stages 3 and 4 and in Years 12 and 13, the pupils and students attain extremely high standards in comparison to the national averages in all three languages.

185. Attainment in the work observed during the inspection is above the national expectation by the end of Key Stage 3. The higher attaining pupils use the target language in a confident manner to ask for clarification, to discuss points of grammar or to convey extensive information.

186. By the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is well above national expectations. Higher attaining pupils produce extended, accurate writing about a range of topics, and in a variety of ways - for example letters, advertisements and arguments - in fluent language. Pupils of all abilities are confident in speaking and have very well developed listening skills, and can, for example, understand fairly lengthy dialogues about healthy eating and daily routines. They use the target language to talk about issues such as appointments elsewhere or reasons for not having produced homework.

187. Attainment in Years 12 and 13 is above national standards and students attain appropriately in relation to their abilities. The highest attaining students use language fluently, in speech and writing, for a wide range of purposes. For example, they make a personal response to a novel, to justify an opinion about the relative qualities of restaurants, or to debate and argue social and political issues like terrorism, alcoholism or the significance of regional languages.

188. Progress in all key stages and in all languages is good. Pupils make a good and very secure start to learning French in Year 7. They make particular progress in speaking and listening very carefully and acquire a wide range of vocabulary and an understanding of some simple structures. The good foundation enables them to learn quickly the basic structures of the new language begun in Year 8. Pupils continue to make good progress throughout the school. In Years 12 and 13, some students who have performed very well in relation to their abilities at GCSE, and have enjoyed the subject, make good progress even though they do not reach the highest grades.

189. In all languages, pupils develop study skills that support their learning effectively, including the use of dictionaries and other reference sources and active listening skills.

190. Attitudes to learning are good and are illustrated by the large numbers of pupils who choose to study two modern foreign languages in Key Stage 4. Pupils are positive and enthusiastic about learning languages and come to lessons having thoroughly prepared their homework and ready to work hard. They have mature and responsible attitudes to study, and are highly motivated. They respond well to the use of the target language for

the lessons, and take a confident, mature and active part in individual and collaborative activities. An example was seen of pupils continuing a serious discussion in groups in the target language when the teacher had to leave the room. Pupils take pride in the presentation of their work, particularly in Key Stage 3.

191. The quality of teaching is good. All teachers are confident, competent linguists, who demonstrate enthusiasm and commitment to their subject. They prepare conscientiously for lessons and have a good knowledge of the demands of examinations and tests. All lessons are well planned, objectives are appropriate and sometimes challenging, and expositions clear. Teachers use a wide range of strategies to review previous work effectively. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace, using a variety of activities and a range of groupings. Teachers have good relationships with pupils, know them well and provide individual support out of lessons where necessary. They are effective in communicating their own enthusiasm for language learning. The open-ended nature of tasks set and good quality support from teachers ensure pupils are able to work at appropriate levels for their abilities.

192. The extensive use of the target language by teachers, and their insistence on its use by the pupils, are strengths. Pupils are so aware of target language use as the medium of communication that, for example, one pupil asked permission to speak in English when she found herself unable to find the appropriate construction in German. Teachers have high expectations of both the amount of work required and the quality of the work, especially in Years 12 and 13, where teachers set themselves the ambitious goal of challenging and deepening students' understanding of complex issues through the modern foreign language.

193. Teachers often make effective use of day-to-day assessment, for example revisiting areas where there have been difficulties and providing good models when pupils make mistakes. They also use this information effectively to plan future lessons. Pupils make cassette tapes so that teachers can assess their oral work, especially those who may be quiet in class. Pupils also help their peers to assess what they know, understand and can do, as part of the review process and they take this responsibility seriously. ICT is used, but inconsistently so within years. Marking is good; comments are often developmental and in the target language. This helps pupils to improve their work. Teachers know pupils well and will intervene to support pupils experiencing difficulties. Homework is used well to extend learning and to consolidate vocabulary and structures.

194. In Key Stage 3, modern foreign languages meet statutory requirements, with all pupils studying French. In addition, pupils have the opportunity to study German, Latin, or the more recently introduced Spanish, from Year 8 onwards. They have a free choice of the additional language to study. At Key Stage 4, all pupils study one foreign language and most pupils take advantage of the excellent opportunity to study two. At A and AS level there is a wide range of languages, and in addition, Russian, is offered at GCSE level, and there are non examination courses in Italian and Japanese. Group sizes are sufficient to make each of the languages on offer cost effective and to facilitate a good interchange of ideas between students. In addition, there are excellent opportunities for independent and supported study of these languages. The department also makes a good input to the general studies course. These opportunities are exceptional and students take full advantage of them. Provision for modern foreign languages is very good

195. The curriculum is extended further through well planned educational visits and exchanges and challenging projects sponsored by private companies. The quality of formal assessment is good and helps pupils to understand how to achieve well in examinations. The department makes a very positive contribution to pupils' social and cultural development through the wide range of activities in which they are involved. In the sixth form, particularly, students are offered the opportunity to discuss moral issues in some depth, often in the respective target language.

196. The level of resourcing and accommodation is adequate. Staff are well qualified and effectively deployed and the department is efficiently and effectively run. There were no major issues to address during the last inspection and the department continues to establish high expectations and an ethos for learning.

198. **Latin**

197. In the GCSE examination in 1999, from a very small cohort, all pupils obtained an A*-C grade, with half obtaining A* and A grades. This high level of achievement is consistent with previous years' results. High standards of achievement have been maintained since the previous inspection. In the A level examinations in 1999, the two students who entered achieved B and C grades.

198. Pupils and students attain well in relation to their abilities and to their performance in other subjects. Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of vocabulary and syntax, and read with a good level of understanding. They translate from Latin into English fluently and accurately. As they progress through the course, they become more aware of literary styles and devices. A Year 12 student translated a difficult Latin poem into English well, with attention to fine detail. She demonstrated good understanding of grammar and syntax, awareness of the literary devices used and commented perceptively on the symbolism used in the poem. Pupils in Year 10 and 11 translated difficult pieces of writing competently and answered questions on them, as well as showing an awareness of the style used, and understanding of how different tenses were formed. Other classes demonstrated good classical knowledge, for example about the role of the forum in life in Pompeii. Pupils make good progress in the development of knowledge skills and understanding throughout.

199. Although the numbers of pupils who opt for lengthy study of the subject are low, pupils show interest in class. A Year 8 pupil cooked honey dates, an example of sweetmeats at the time of Pompeii, which her classmates tried. Homework is conscientiously prepared and is often used as a basis for lessons. Pupils work quietly, with concentration and seriousness of purpose. They are curious about the period they are studying and enjoy stories about ancient times. They have good relationships with teachers.

200. Teaching is good overall and never less than satisfactory. Teachers have good subject knowledge and form pleasant relationships with pupils. Contextual information is made interesting and appropriate, and aims and objectives are clear. Lessons are taught by a variety of appropriate styles and methods. For example whole-class teaching, group and pair work, and presentations are used effectively. Lessons are often leavened by a sense of humour and by interesting stories, myths and legends of the times which pupils enjoy. Expositions and explanations about, for example, relative pronouns, verb tenses and participles are clear. The pace of lessons is usually brisk, and offers appropriate levels of challenge. Marking is conscientious and common errors are identified and rectified in the following lesson.

201. The subject is managed well, although currently teaching is not evaluated by direct observation. The curriculum is appropriate and supports the school's ethos of a broad curriculum. As during the previous inspection, the subject supports the development of linguistic and cultural awareness, as well as developing literary awareness. The scheme of work provides continuity and progression but is to be reviewed shortly when part of a new course is published. Assessment is good and resources and accommodation are adequate. The subject has maintained high standards since the last inspection.

203. **Music**

202. In the end of Key Stage 3 teachers' assessments in 1999 the proportion of pupils reaching the national expectation was exceeded that seen nationally. The number of candidates taking GCSE is too small to make comparison with other schools or to note trends. Nevertheless, all pupils obtained A*-C grades in 1999, as they did in 1998. Most candidates are skilled instrumentalists who consistently achieve higher grades in keeping with their abilities and aptitude. The one student was entered for the AS level examination and obtained a B grade.

203. Most pupils enter the school with little knowledge, few skills and limited experience in music. The exceptions are those who take instrumental lessons privately or in school, who are significantly ahead in performance skills and musical literacy. About one-sixth of pupils start or continue with instrumental or vocal lessons in school. Their progress throughout the school is good, so that the gap in skills widens throughout all key stages. The carousel in the timetable in Years 8 and 9, while allowing for groups of smaller size, adversely affects progress of some pupils in music. This is particularly true of performance skills for those who do not learn to play an instrument outside the classroom, who may have no contact with the instrument for between three and six months at a time. Nevertheless, good progress is made in composition and satisfactory progress in listening skills across the key stage. In Year 9, many pupils compose using traditional notation, while others still use letter names and rhythmic patterns. Compositions have good tonality and simple form, and bass parts are often added. Listening skills include aural identification of instruments, time signatures, mood, tempo and dynamics.

204. By the end of Key Stage 4 pupils' attainment is above average overall. Pupils' performance skills are good overall, although some have to practice hard to play their own compositions accurately. Pupils identify errors in their own playing of instruments competently and correct what they do. They use specialist vocabulary accurately to describe what they hear and compare different extracts well to identify compositional techniques. Almost all who continue music in Key Stage 4 are able instrumentalists. Time allocation is short compared

with many schools, so solo performance skills are left in the charge of instrumental teachers, and only ensemble work is done in class.

205. Numbers following the subject are small in the sixth form, and currently no one is working towards A level in Year 13. Some students study music as part of the general studies course and in activities, where four skilled instrumentalists, who are attempting Grade 8 Associated Board examinations on one or more instruments, are using the time to prepare for these examinations. The mixed group of A and AS students are at this stage struggling a little to understand the rules of harmony, but performance skills are strong and listening skills satisfactory.

206. Throughout the school, pupils make good progress overall in relation to prior attainment, despite the disruption caused by the timetable in Key Stage 3. Those who take instrumental or vocal lessons make very good progress in performance skills, musical literacy and general musical experience. No pupils with special educational needs were seen during the inspection, but efforts, such as enlarging scores for pupils with visual impairment, are made to assist their learning.

207. In all key stages behaviour is almost impeccable. Attitudes are sound, and many pupils arrive at lessons expecting to enjoy hard work. High levels of concentration are maintained well when staff are leading the class, though there is often a drop when pupils work individually or in groups. All respect the fabric, resources, adults and peers, and each other's strengths and weaknesses. There is good support from peers, often help and sometimes teaching. Relationships are very good indeed. Initiative and creativity are seen mostly in performance and composition. Pupils accept responsibility for their own learning more and more as they mature.

208. Teaching is almost always good, with many instances of very good practice. Staff have good knowledge, skills and understanding in the subject. Schemes, lesson plans, methodologies and teaching styles show an understanding of how pupils learn, and expectations are realistically high. Teaching is confident, control is easily maintained and infectious enthusiasm and energy motivate pupils in a warm, friendly climate for learning. The pace of lessons is good, but is not always transmitted effectively to pupils by setting deadlines for the completion of tasks done individually or in groups. Classroom management is good. Praise is used well. Day-to-day assessment is satisfactory and is used well to plan teaching, though sometimes innovations are held back by lack of the resources needed. Homework is relevant to work in class and enhances learning. The provision for ICT is insufficient for work at both key stages and in the sixth year.

209. Generous time is given to extracurricular activities, which are attended well and which enhance learning. There are three choirs, an orchestra, a brass band and several other instrumental ensembles. The standards reached by the chamber choir are excellent, and they win many awards. Musical productions are staged annually. Performances by these groups enhance the cultural life of the school and the community.

210. The subject is well managed. Progress since the last inspection includes new schemes which fulfil the demands of the National Curriculum, better teaching in Key Stage 3 and more effective assessment. There is also some provision for the use of ICT, but it is insufficient although staff are now well prepared for work in this area.

212. **Physical education**

211. In the Key Stage 3 teacher assessments in 1999 the majority of pupils achieved above national expectations. Results in the GCSE examination for 1999 for grades A*-C were significantly above the national average, with all the entry achieving A*-C grades. Over 50 per cent of the entry achieved A* or A grades. Similar results were obtained over the previous two years. In the A level examinations students results reflect the national average.

212. By the end of Key Stage 3 the attainment of pupils exceeds the national expectations in all areas of the subject. Most pupils apply the techniques, skills and competition rules well to several aspects of the subject effectively, including netball, gymnastics and dance. Basic skills are good and provide a platform for future development. In netball, most pupils pass the ball accurately, and move appropriately into space to receive the ball. Higher attaining pupils in netball pivot successfully to create both time and space to control and pass the ball, and are developing appropriate tactical awareness. Many pupils plan and compose complex sequences of movement in gymnastics, although the quality of much of the movement does not reflect the ability of most of the pupils. Pupils also compose complex dance sequences. By the end of Key stage 4, pupils develop

sophisticated sequences in aerobics lesson, and lead the rest of the group through these sequences to effectively develop fitness levels. Advanced principles and tactical awareness of the game situation in netball are well established for all pupils studying for the GCSE course at Key Stage 4. Pupils show competent skills of planning and evaluating their work at both key stages. They are most apparent in those students studying for the GCSE course at Key Stage 4 and, for example, were illustrated very well in a practical lesson where pupils devised practice drills for the rest of the group in order to develop attacking strategies in netball. The role of exercise in establishing and maintaining health is well understood through the good range of warm-up routines provided in lessons, and through lessons specifically dedicated to health, exercise and fitness at Key Stage 4. However, most pupils at Key Stage 3 have not developed an appropriate understanding of the short and long-term effects of exercise on the body systems.

213. Only one sixth form lesson was observed during the inspection, and attainment is above average. Students show a good understanding of human physiology and anatomy.

214. Pupils make good progress in most lessons at Key Stage 3 and progress is never less than satisfactory. Pupils develop skills and good understanding of the techniques and rules. For example, in a Key Stage 3 netball lesson, skills taught in previous lessons were effectively consolidated by applying them to a game situation while at the same time developing tactical awareness. However, the highest attaining pupils were rarely sufficiently challenged in either skills or development of tactical awareness. Progress in observing and evaluating their own performance and the performance of others in the group is good and progress is equally good for pupils of all levels of attainment. Progress is good overall at Key Stage 4. In the GCSE course, progress is very good when basic skills are developed and refined, and tactical knowledge applied to the game situation. Progress is also good in aerobics where the development of planning and evaluation skills is particularly apparent. Evaluation of individual performance by pupils and staff is used effectively to improve standards during many lessons, although the marking of work for GCSE pupils is not consistently focused on setting targets for improvement. Target setting for individual pupils at both key stages is not yet influencing progress. A good range of extracurricular activities, and fixtures with other schools, provide many opportunities for pupils to extend and develop their skills.

215. Pupils' attitudes to learning are very positive at both key stages. They are enthusiastic, well behaved, and cooperative, demonstrating a real enjoyment of the subject. They are attentive and their capacity to sustain concentration is good. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff are very good. There are many opportunities for pupils to work independently and collaboratively. Opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and to undertake different roles such as coach or official are also developing.

216. The quality of teaching is good and is never less than satisfactory. A secure knowledge of the subject is regularly conveyed to pupils through perceptive observation of performance, appropriate intervention and good teacher directed question and answer sessions. Thorough planning, incorporating varied teaching strategies and an appropriate sequence of activities involving both individual and collaborative learning is a feature of many lessons, and is effective in helping pupils make good progress. However, strategies to refine and develop skills further are sometimes not incorporated, particularly in gymnastics lessons. Discipline and class management is very good. Day-to-day assessment of performance during lessons is regularly used to plan future teaching. However, although work on using assessment data is developing, targets are not set for pupils to help them improve their work, and pupils are not sufficiently involved so that they can identify their own areas for improvement.

217. The curriculum meets statutory requirements at both key stages and the time allocated is appropriate to cover National Curriculum requirements. However the use of single lessons at Key Stage 3 is inappropriate because there is often insufficient time in these lessons for pupils to make measurable progress. There are a broad range of activities at Key Stage 4 which provide a sound preparation for sixth form leisure activities. Schemes of work are detailed. They are good working documents, and usually support what is being taught, though they do not include enough detail to support the most effective development of higher attaining pupils.

218. Although leadership of the department is good in many respects and communication within the department is very effective, there is a lack of appropriate focus and prioritising and also very little evaluation of the work of the department. Development planning does not effectively identify priorities or indicate costing or allocated responsibilities. A good working relationship exists between members of the department. Teaching is not evaluated by the head of department and departmental meetings are not yet an effective means of encouraging appropriate department and staff development. A good handbook offers essential guidelines for the department. The staff give generously of their time and provide good role models for the pupils and students.

Accommodation indoors is satisfactory although lack of space outdoors restricts progress in several activities.

219. Progress on issues for improvement following the last inspection report has been good in several areas. There are now many opportunities for the development of planning and evaluation skills by pupils and this is now good. Non-participants in lessons are now purposefully engaged and the time allocation for Key Stage 4 is now satisfactory. However, there is still a lack of challenge for the most able in many lessons. Outdoor accommodation is still unsatisfactory, although recent developments with the local authority would indicate that this problem will soon be rectified.

221. **Psychology**

220. Psychology is taken in the sixth form as an A level course. In the 1999 A level examinations, half of those entered obtained A and B grades, an improvement on the results of 1998. Attainment seen during the inspection matches these results and reflects the full grade range at A level. Students differentiate between ethics and morals well, and highest attaining students do so articulately and independently, while others use their own notes to provide guidance. They explain their understanding of the models of memory effectively with appropriate reference to known studies and theories to substantiate their views. Progress is good and by Year 13 students are confident in referring to a wide range of source material, summarising supportive evidence and using conflicting evidence and argument effectively in their own essays.

221. Students have positive attitudes and work hard. They are enthusiastic, concentrate well and respond well to the texts and materials provided by teachers.

222. Teaching is good and sets high standards of students. Teachers are appropriately experienced and have good subject knowledge. They are well prepared and use a wide range of text materials to provide students with background reading. Teachers encourage students to read and research into current theories of learning and memory, and have high expectations that students will contribute to discussions with their own ideas. These methods are effective, encouraging a high level of participation by students and they contribute effectively to the success and good progress that students make. The subject is well managed.

224. **Religious education**

223. This is an improving subject with a number of strengths, and good potential for further development. The quality of teaching and learning has been raised since the previous inspection, and standards of attainment improved at Key Stage 3 and in examination courses. There are, however, still weaknesses in provision for teaching the agreed syllabus at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, which were identified in the previous report. These have not been fully addressed.

224. In the GCSE examinations of 1999, the proportion of pupils gaining grade A*-C passes was well above the national average for all schools, and match those for schools of a similar type. Standards have risen since the previous inspection. The small number of entries for the GCE A Level examination in 1999 make comparisons with national figures insecure. With that reservation, the proportion of pupils gaining passes was well above the national average, and slightly above average for schools of a similar type.

225. By the end of Key Stage 3, the attainment of pupils pursuing the agreed syllabus is well above the expectations for their age. Pupils have a very good knowledge and understanding of the richness and diversity of religion, of the place of Christianity and other principal religions in the country, and of their distinctive features. Their understanding of religious language, concepts and symbols, is equally strong. Their skills in applying religious insights to moral and ethical questions are particularly well developed.

226. By the end of Key Stage 4, however, the attainment of the majority of pupils is below the expectations of the agreed syllabus, with the exception of their understanding of the moral dimensions of religious belief. For those pupils following the GCSE course, attainment is above average. GCSE pupils have a good understanding of moral issues, for example, identifying key issues in discussion about the sanctity of life and capital punishment. For timetabling reasons, there was no opportunity to judge the attainment of pupils following components of the agreed syllabus in the sixth form. However, the time allocation of two five-week modules in the upper sixth general studies programme, is insufficient for the syllabus's expectations to be achieved.

227. At Key Stage 3, pupils make good progress overall, with progress being particularly strong in Year 9 where they respond well to the particularly challenging work involving abstract concepts, and evaluating evidence, for

example, the design and experiential arguments for the existence of God. During their first year in the school, pupils acquire a sound knowledge of aspects of Judaism, such as the Torah, and the Passover and Seder meal, and they develop an understanding of the importance of these to believers. Good progress is maintained in Year 8 in a more demanding study of Christianity and Islam.

228. Progress is satisfactory at Key Stage 4 overall. The majority of pupils following the agreed syllabus make good progress in individual lessons, but their overall progress over the key stage is unsatisfactory. The unsatisfactory attainment and overall progress at Key Stage 4 is not a reflection of either the teaching of the subject, or pupils' attitudes towards it; it is because the time allocated to teaching it over the key stage is too low. Pupils have eight double lessons in Year 10, and five in Year 11. This is insufficient for the syllabus to be studied in the breadth and depth necessary for good progress to be made, and appropriate standards of attainment reached.

229. The progress of pupils pursuing the GCSE examination course is good overall, and in many instances very good, both in lessons, and over the key stage. Pupils make good progress, for example, in developing their knowledge of biblical texts through research when drawing on evidence for arguments for and against capital punishment. The progress of pupils studying the Old Testament and the philosophy of religion at A level is also good overall, and in instances very good, both in lessons, and over the duration of the course.

230. Pupils' attitudes towards the subject are good overall, and in many instances, very good. They come to lessons keen to learn and settle down to work without prompting. They listen well, and sustain concentration well in a range of contexts. The pride they take in their work can be seen in the high standard of the presentation of their classwork and homework. Pupils are very responsive orally, and keen to ask and answer questions, as was well seen in a Year 8 lesson on the concept of the Trinity in Christian theology. They also listen with respect to each other's views and opinions, as for example, when discussing moral arguments for the existence of God in the lower sixth. They behave very well, and enjoy very good relationships with their teachers and with each other, showing good care for their peers with special educational needs. Pupils are provided with very good opportunities for developing skills of collaborative working, through the paired and small group work which is a feature of many lessons, for example. For example, in Year 11, pupils worked well together, considering each others' opinions in exploring the concept of the sanctity of life. Opportunities for pupils to develop skills of independent learning, research and inquiry, have improved since the previous inspection, and are now good. Year 8 pupils, for example, have researched religious responses to issues of animal rights. The subject makes good overall provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

231. The quality of teaching has improved since the previous inspection, and is a strength of the department. It is good overall, with an element of excellent teaching. Where teaching is strongest, teachers' very good command of their subject is shared well with pupils and has a good impact on the quality of exposition and questioning. Teachers know clearly what they wish their pupils to learn, share their intentions with them, and plan their lessons effectively to achieve their aims, as, for example, in Year 11 GCSE work on religious responses to issues of capital punishment. Teachers engage and hold their pupils' interest through a variety of interesting and challenging activities and tasks, which are well matched to pupils' different needs. Year 7 pupils, for example, shared actively in a re-enactment of a Shabbat meal, and through that were led to a good understanding of its significance in Judaism. Teachers structure their lessons well, making good use of time, and striking a good balance between whole-class, group and individual work, and between written and oral work. They regularly set homework which extends the work done in class, for example, creative writing on the fruits of the Spirit in Christianity in Year 8. They mark pupils' work conscientiously and supportively, and give pupils very good opportunities to evaluate their own attainment and progress. This good teaching is underpinned by the very good relationships which teachers enjoy with their pupils. Where teaching is less strong, it is a consequence of the cramped classroom accommodation placing some restrictions on the variety of activities which can be employed with larger classes, for example, drama or role play.

232. The department is well led and managed by a subject head who has a clear vision of the educational direction the subject should take. The quality of schemes of work and pupils' diet in the classroom has been improved since the previous inspection, and particularly at Key Stage 3. However, insufficient time for the agreed syllabus to be fully covered at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form restricts how far standards can rise. Pupils are now successfully encouraged to take more responsibility for their own learning, through independent research, and good use of self-assessment and target setting.

234. PART C: INSPECTION DATA

234. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

233.The team consisted of 14 inspectors, including a lay inspector, who were in school for a total of 58 inspection days. During the week 233 lessons or parts of lessons, including tutor periods were inspected. The total time spent observing lessons was 168 hours 5 minutes. In addition, inspectors attended registration sessions and assemblies. Teachers were observed teaching all subjects included in the contract. Observations of pupils and students were made at breaktimes, lunchtimes, before and after school. Inspectors talked to pupils and students formally about their views of the school and to individuals and groups in lessons and around school. There were discussions with teachers, heads of departments, heads of year, members of the senior staff, the Headteacher, the Chair of the Governing Body, other governors, support staff and parents. Discussions also took place with administrative, site management and caretaker staff. Pupils' and students' attendance records and reports were examined and the school's budget figures were inspected. Inspectors scrutinised students' and pupils' work in books, folders, displayed work around the school and photographic evidence of previous work.

234.Documentation provided by the school was analysed before and during the inspection. The Registered Inspector held a meeting attended by 60 parents before the inspection and the team considered 463 responses from parents to the pre-inspection questionnaire.

236. **DATA AND INDICATORS**

236. **Pupil data**

	Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of pupils with statements of SEN	Number of pupils on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals
Y7 – Y13	1246	4	9	47

236. **Teachers and classes**

236. **Qualified teachers (Y7 – Y13)**

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent):	78.85
Number of pupils per qualified teacher:	15.76

236. **Education support staff (Y7 – Y13)**

Total number of education support staff:	6
Total aggregate hours worked each week:	162
Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:	76.5
Average teaching group size:	KS3 27
	KS4 20

236.

Financial data

Financial year:	1998/99
	£
Total income	2,776,806
Total expenditure	2,765,296
Expenditure per pupil	2,237.29
Balance brought forward from previous year	81,171
Balance carried forward to next year	92,681

Number of questionnaires sent out: 1241
 Number of questionnaires returned: 463

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	12	47	25	13	2
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	27	58	9	5	1
The school handles complaints from parents well	14	39	40	6	1
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	21	54	16	8	2
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	28	50	13	8	1
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	56	41	3	1	0
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	48	45	5	2	1
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	35	53	5	6	1
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	36	50	12	2	0
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	37	54	7	2	0
My child(ren) like(s) school	40	47	7	5	1