

INSPECTION REPORT

THE HARWICH SCHOOL

Dovercourt, Harwich

LEA area: Essex

Unique Reference Number: 115369

Headteacher: Mr T J McAleavy

Reporting inspector: Dr Barbara Hilton
3228

Dates of inspection: 6 -10 December 1999

Under OFSTED contract number: 708116

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
Type of control:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Main school - mixed Sixth form - mixed
School address:	Hall Lane Dovercourt Harwich Essex CO12 3TG
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Laura Garnham
Date of previous inspection:	18-22 September 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members	Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
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	Sixth form	Teaching
	Vocational education	Curriculum
		Leadership and management
		Efficiency
Husain Akhtar, Lay Inspector		Attitudes, behaviour and personal development
		Attendance
		Support, guidance and students' welfare
		Partnership with parents and the community
		Equal opportunities
Philip Winch	English	
	Drama	
Margaret Price	Mathematics	Staffing
David Leonard	Science	
John Richards	Art	Learning resources
Peter Thompson	Design and technology	
	Information and communication technology	
Marjorie Thomas	Geography	Accommodation
Joyce Sanderson	History	Special educational needs
Derek Cronin	Modern foreign languages: French and German	Assessment
Barbara Johnstone	Music	
Barry Simmons	Physical education	
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MAIN FINDINGS

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Leadership is strong and has vision.
- The school develops strong and effective links with partners in the local community.
- Students progress well across the main school and satisfactorily across the sixth form.
- GCSE results reflect good value-added, overall.
- Attainment is high in drama, business and physical education.
- Teaching is good: staff are hardworking and committed to the students.
- Pastoral arrangements are good; students' performance is monitored well, to help them improve.
- Students' attitudes to learning are good and they like the school.
- Governors have high expectations; they contribute in many practical ways to the work of the school and its positive ethos.
- Support and monitoring of teaching and curricular developments are strengths of the school.

WHERE THE SCHOOL HAS WEAKNESSES

- I. Results at A level are not as good as for vocational courses in the sixth form.
- II. Standards of writing across the curriculum are low and the development of numeracy across curriculum is uneven.
- III. Absence and poor punctuality detract too frequently from students' learning and progress.
- IV. Requirements are not met in the provision of religious education (at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form), information and communication technology (at Key Stage 4) or of collective worship and no required information is in the prospectus and governors' annual report.

This is an effective school: its strengths greatly outweigh its weaknesses. The governors' action plan will set out how the weaknesses identified in the inspection are to be tackled. The plan will be sent to all parents or guardians of students at the school.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE THE LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good progress since the last inspection. Both GCSE results and the quality of teaching have improved markedly and it was recently named as one of the most improved schools, nationally. Results at A level have not improved, however.

The school has successfully tackled key issues of the last report about teaching and behaviour, both of which are now very much better. The assessment policy is used consistently across the school and students' performance is regularly monitored. The number of computers is now good. The curriculum for information and communication technology is much improved at Key Stage 3, and opportunities for students to work individually on computers are good. The school is improving opportunities for older students, but National Curriculum requirements are not met at Key Stage 4. The size of the senior management team is reduced. School planning is well focused. Health and safety issues have been rectified. Requirements to provide religious education in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, and a daily act of worship, are still not met. The strength of school leadership, and very effective contributions of governors, have assisted the school in making improvements and will support further developments.

STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS

The following table shows standards achieved by 14 and 16 year olds in national tests and GCSE examinations in 1999. The standards achieved in A/AS level examinations refer to 1998, the last year for which national comparisons are available.

Performance in:	Compared with all schools	Compared with similar schools	Key
Key Stage 3	D	C	<i>well above average</i> A
GCSE Examinations	C	C	<i>above average</i> B
A/AS-levels	E	N/A	<i>average</i> C
			<i>below average</i> D
			<i>well below average</i> E

At the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, results of National Curriculum tests in English and science were below the national average. In English, results were below the average for similar schools, but in science they matched the average. Results in mathematics were better: they were in line with the average for all schools and above average relative to similar schools. By the end of Year 9 over half the students attain in line with national expectations in lessons, which represents good progress from low levels of attainment on entry, but weaknesses in writing and the use of numbers persist. Students' average results at GCSE in 1999 were in line with the national average, both for all schools and for similar schools. Students do better across the full range of grades (A*-G) than at the higher grades (A*-C). GCSE results in science were above the national average and better than in English and mathematics, which were both well below average. Overall results at GCSE are similar for boys and girls. Results represent good progress across the key stage, including for students with special educational needs. Students generally do well in English literature, drama, double-award science, modern foreign languages, physical education and business subjects. Results in art and design, design and technology, geography and information systems are not as good as in other subjects.

Results at A level in individual subjects fluctuate year by year because numbers of students who enter are often low, and many start the course with minimum requirements. Overall, progress is satisfactory; results in drama, physics and physical education are generally high. Students do better on vocational courses, on the whole, because the way their work is organised helps them to understand what they need to do to improve. Last year, 37 students went on to university.

QUALITY OF TEACHING

	Overall quality	Most effective in:	Least effective in:
Years 7-9	Good	science, German, religious education	music
Years 10-11	Good	drama, science, French, German, physical education, business	geography, information and communication technology
Sixth form	Good	art, drama, physics, business, physical education	
English	Good		
Mathematics	Satisfactory		

The quality of teaching is good. Teaching is satisfactory or better in 96 per cent of lessons, good or better in 60 per cent of lessons, and very good or occasionally excellent in 19 per cent of lessons. Teaching is unsatisfactory in only four per cent of lessons. Teachers use their knowledge well to provide a wide range of interesting activities, as in drama and English literature, which increase students' subject knowledge and understanding. Planning is generally good. Students are well managed in most lessons. Poor behaviour is infrequent and usually develops only when activities lack interest and challenge. Expectations are not high enough in some geography and music lessons and occasionally in mathematics. Expectations are high in subjects where teaching is good - for example in English, drama, science, physical education and in many modern foreign language lessons, design and technology and sixth form art lessons. Marking is frequent and, especially at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, provides helpful guidance on how to improve. Homework is generally well used.

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	Good in lessons and corridors, satisfactory elsewhere.
Attendance	Unsatisfactory, particularly in Year 11. Unauthorised absence is high.
Ethos*	Positive: relationships are good.
Leadership and management	Strong and committed to improving teaching and learning. Governors contribute well. Rigorous use is made of monitoring information. Teamwork is very good.
Curriculum	Broad and balanced overall. Curricular planning is generally good. Students' reading is improved through work in English, but opportunities for improvement in writing and numeracy are not systematically provided across subjects. The few vocational courses provided in the sixth form are well organised; no vocational courses are provided at Key Stage 4.
Students with special educational needs	Support is good and effectively organised. Work in lessons helps students to progress well, and some stay on for sixth form courses.
Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Generally good, particularly provision for social and moral development. Students benefit from well planned personal and social education and from many links with the local community.
Staffing, resources and accommodation	Professional development arrangements are very good. Staffing changes, some due to ill health, have affected teaching and learning in several subjects, including information and communication technology design and technology, and music. Learning resources are of good quality. Accommodation, including the site, is spacious and exceeds the current requirements of the school.
Value for money	Good

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

THE PARENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What most parents like about the school	What some parents are not happy about
<p>V. They find the school pleasurable.</p> <p>VI. They are well informed about their children's progress.</p> <p>VII. Their children like the school.</p> <p>VIII. Behaviour and interest in learning have improved since the last inspection.</p> <p>IX. The school is managed well and the values the school promotes.</p>	<p>X. Staff changes have affected their children's learning.</p> <p>XI. Homework.</p> <p>XII. Incidents of poor behaviour.</p> <p>XIII. The removal of the learning zone.</p>

Overall, parents are supportive of the school. Inspectors endorse parents' positive views. Parents' concerns about homework were mixed: some felt that Year 7 students are asked to do too much and others that older students do not do sufficient. Parents linked concerns about homework with removal of the learning zone (which is about to be reinstated). During the inspection, homework was regularly set although the amount varied. Many students, younger ones especially, worked hard in the library, but not all students have such good work habits; a small minority treat homework casually. Governors have made clear their expectations about good behaviour, which has improved since the last inspection: it is generally good in the classrooms. Around the site there are occasional incidents of poor behaviour, but generally the school is orderly and behaviour is satisfactory. Staff changes have affected the continuity of students' learning in several subjects. While a few gaps remain, most subjects are well staffed.

· KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

To raise further the standards of work and attainment of students, the governors, headteacher, senior management team and staff should:

- XIV. place more emphasis on the planning and monitoring of sixth form work, to improve the suitability of courses for the sixth formers staying on and to raise their standards of achievement (paragraphs 9, 47 and 97);
- XV. systematically provide and monitor opportunities for improvement in students' writing and number skills across the curriculum (paragraphs 13,16 and 45);
- XVI. further strengthen systems for improving attendance and punctuality to achieve greater participation in what the school has to offer (paragraphs 36 and 37);
- XVII. meet requirements in full to provide religious education (at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form), information and communication technology (at Key Stage 4), more frequent collective worship, and all the required information in the prospectus and governors' annual report (paragraphs 52, 60 and 73).

The key issues concerning religious education and collective worship were contained in the last inspection report. In addition to the preceding key issues, the following less important weaknesses should be considered for inclusion in the governors' action plan. These are indicated in paragraphs on: the range and suitability of activities in geography, music and mathematics lessons (42); homework (43); opportunities to learn dance (46); reference to the National Curriculum in assessment at Key Stage 3 (53); accommodation for information and communication technology (89); and the efficiency of use and cost of the site and accommodation (95).

INTRODUCTION

· Characteristics of the school

1. The Harwich School is an 11-18 comprehensive school in Dovercourt, Harwich, Essex. The total number of students is 1116, which is more than in most secondary schools, and there are about equal numbers of boys and girls. In most years about 200 students are admitted, but Years 10 and 11 are a little smaller, with about 170 in each. The sixth form totals 175 and includes a few mature students.

2. The attainment of students on entry in Year 7 is wide-ranging, but overall below average. The proportions of students on the school's register of special educational needs, at 18.1 per cent, and with Statements of Special Educational Need, at 1.9 per cent, are both broadly average. Most of the students with the most pronounced level of need have moderate learning difficulties and about one quarter have emotional and behavioural difficulties. Many of the students on entry in Year 7 have poor literacy and numeracy skills. The school, together with nearby primary schools and businesses, recognises the low levels of basic skills among local young people. The local community includes areas of affluence as well as pronounced disadvantage. A joint bid for Education Action Zone status has been successful and intensive work on basic skills, focused initially on children in primary schools, will start in the year 2000.

3. Most of the students are white; a low proportion come from ethnic minority backgrounds. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals in the main school (Years 7-11) is 20.2 per cent, or just above average; few sixth formers take up their entitlement. In the last few years, the proportion of students continuing in education beyond Year 11 has been a little lower than is usually the case but, compared with other parts of the country, slightly more gain employment. In 1999, 37 students went on to university, that is about half of the students at the top of the school.

4. The school's statement of its mission expresses ideals about empowering individuals, working in an atmosphere of mutual respect, trust and co-operation, and creating a better world. The school makes extensive use of targets, review and analysis to work towards its aims, and of priorities to raise achievement and to improve literacy and numeracy skills among its younger students.

5. The school is a little smaller than at the time of the last inspection; to a large extent this is due to a dip in student numbers in Years 10 and 11. The proportion of students with special educational needs has increased by about 70 per cent. In other ways, the school community is similar to what it was at the time of the last inspection.

• **Key indicators**

Attainment at Key Stage 3¹

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 or latest reporting year:

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	96	74	170
(1998)	(87)	(98)	(185)

National Curriculum Test Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	45 (57)	57 (51)	46 (43)
	Girls	52 (75)	48 (55)	40 (45)
	Total	97 (132)	105 (106)	86 (88)
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	57 (71)	62 (57)	51 (48)
	National	63 (65)	62 (48)	55 (56)
	School	18 (37)	33 (31)	22 (21)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teacher Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Number of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	Boys	50 (150)	61 (48)	53 (38)
	Girls	51 (67)	53 (54)	44 (45)
	Total	101 (117)	114 (102)	97 (83)
Percentage at NC Level 5 or above	School	59 (63)	67 (55)	57 (45)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
	School	30 (32)	35 (34)	23 (27)
Percentage at NC Level 6 or above	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

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

Attainment at Key Stage 4²

N Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
1999	88	108	196
(1998)	(118)	(93)	(211)

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	33 (40)	79 (107)	86 (117)
	Girls	47 (40)	101 (80)	106 (89)
Percentage achieving standard specified	Total School	80 (80) 41 (38)	180 (187) 92 (89)	192 (206) 98 (98)
	National	47.8 (44.6)	88.4 (89.8)	93.9 (95.2)

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
99 (98)	35 (30)	34 (25)	69 (55)

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	12.5 (10.5)	12.4 (10.6)	12.5 (10.5)	2.0 (2.2)	2.0 (2.1)	2.0 (2.0)
National	-	-	N/A (17.6)	-	-	N/A (2.8)

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

	Number	% Success rate
School	38 (29)	50 (52)
National		N/A (72.5)

- 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

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

	Number	% Success rate
School	18 (20)	94 (85)
National		N/A

Attendance

Percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year:

		%
Authorised Absence	School	8.8
	National comparative data	7.9
Unauthorised Absence	School	1.9
	National comparative data	1.1

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Exclusions

Number of exclusions of students (of statutory school age) during the previous year.

	Number
Fixed period	111
Permanent	1

Quality of teaching

Percentage of teaching observed which is:

	%
Very good or better	19
Satisfactory or better	96
Less than satisfactory	4

· **PART A: ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL**

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

· **Attainment and progress**

6. The attainment of students on entry, while wide-ranging, is below the national average, overall; levels of literacy are generally low. The proportions of students with special educational needs and those with Statements of Special Educational Need are both average.

7. The results of National Curriculum tests in core subjects (English, mathematics and science) at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 were, taken together, below average relative to all schools nationally, but in line with the average for similar schools. Results in mathematics were better than in the other core subjects, being in line with the average for all schools and above average relative to similar schools. In lessons in the core subjects at the end of Year 9, well over half the students attain in line with national expectations, which represents generally good progress across the key stage.

8. Students' average results in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in 1999 were in line with the national average, both for all schools and for similar schools. Students did well across the full range of grades (A*-G), particularly for one or more subjects, where their results were above average, relative to all schools and well above average relative to similar schools. Results for five subjects at the higher grades (A*-C) were below average, relative both to all schools and to similar schools. Overall, GCSE results reflect good progress across Key Stage 4, for both boys and girls. Attainment in lessons at the end of Key Stage 4 is relatively better than at the end of Key Stage 3. Some weaknesses in the quality of written work remain, however, and also in the use of number across the curriculum.

9. Results in the Advanced (A) level examinations of the General Certificate of Education are well below average overall. In a few subjects results equal or surpass the national averages (for example in drama, physics and physical education) but in most others results are well below average. Results of General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) courses are better and, for business at advanced level, the proportion of students gaining the full award is above average. Results of courses at intermediate level are below average, though some students who gain units rather than full awards successfully re-enter in the following year.

10. Students make satisfactory or good progress in the great majority of lessons, and good or very good progress in over half their lessons. The amount of progress made in lessons is closely linked to the quality of teaching. The good, sometimes very good, teaching of reading in English, and drama, physical education and aspects of design and technology (food, particularly) is reflected in students' good progress in these subjects throughout the school. Weaknesses in teaching, including insufficient use of challenging activities and difficulties in managing instances of poor behaviour, detract from students' progress and the standards they achieve, as in a few lessons in mathematics, and a significant minority of lessons in geography and music. Students with special educational needs make good progress towards the targets of their individual education plans. They nearly all achieve a GCSE certificate at the end of Year 11 and some continue in the sixth form on GNVQ intermediate level courses. Sixth form students generally make good

progress in lessons, which is better than their A level results might suggest. Many embark on A levels with minimum requirements. When their performance at A level is compared with their GCSE results against national benchmarks, then the overall A level results represent satisfactory added value. Weaknesses of factual recall, and in writing cogent essays under examination conditions, cause problems for some. The school has very effective monitoring systems to support students' progress in all years. Keeness to learn among nearly all students assists their progress and many make good use of library and computer facilities to help learning.

· *English*

11. Results of National Curriculum tests in English at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 were below average, both for all schools nationally and for similar schools. Girls achieved better than boys. Results in English were below those in mathematics, and broadly similar to those in science. Attainment in lessons at the end of Key Stage 3 is below national expectations, overall. Writing skills are weaker than skills of listening, speaking and reading. Students enter the school with below average levels of attainment in English and weak literacy skills, so attainment at the end of the key stage represents generally good progress.

12. GCSE results in English language in 1999 were well below average, both for all schools nationally and for similar schools. When account is taken of results obtained nationally, performance in English was similar to that in mathematics and below that in science. Results in literature were just below average and not quite as good as in 1998. In lessons at the end of Key Stage 4 attainment is below average in language, but average in literature. Progress in lessons and across Key Stage 4 is generally satisfactory in language and good in literature. Results at A level and attainment in sixth form lessons are below expectations for A level work. While students make generally satisfactory progress in reading, the quality of their writing and persistent weakness in grammar and spelling detract from overall standards.

· *Literacy*

13. The school has worked hard to improve standards of reading, in which progress is good. The content of written work is mostly satisfactory but there are weaknesses in spelling, punctuation and grammar in all years. Students are confident speakers, but they do not always communicate in standard English and in some subjects response is brief. Listening skills are good.

· *Drama*

14. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with the national expectation. GCSE results in 1999 were above the national average and boys did better than girls. Results at A level in 1999 were well above the national average. In lessons, attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 and the sixth form is well above expectations. Progress is good across Key Stage 3 and very good across Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Students achieve better results at GCSE and A level in drama than in most of their other subjects.

· *Mathematics*

15. Results of National Curriculum tests in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 were in line with the national average and above average when compared with similar

schools. Results in mathematics were better than in English and science. GCSE results in mathematics in 1999 were well below the average when compared both with all schools nationally and with similar schools. Results dipped in 1999, because of the selection of papers taken at GCSE, and were much better in 1998. In 1999, performance in mathematics was below that in science and broadly similar to that in English. Results at A level in 1999 were below average. In lessons at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 attainment is in line with national expectations, overall. Students make good progress across Key Stage 3 and satisfactory progress across Key Stage 4. While sixth form students make satisfactory progress, attainment in lessons is below expectations for A level work.

- *Numeracy*

16. Within mathematics, standards of numeracy cover a wide range, but they are improving and are adequate, overall. Examples of the use of numeracy are found across the curriculum, including in science, art, geography, history and vocational subjects, but there is no systematic approach and standards are uneven.

- *Science*

17. Results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 in science in 1999 were below the overall national average but in line with the average for similar schools. The results in science were lower than in mathematics but broadly similar to those in English. GCSE results in 1999 were above average, both for all schools nationally and for schools with a similar intake. Students did better in science at GCSE than in both English and mathematics. In the sixth form, A level results have fluctuated over the last few years and generally results in physics have been high: in 1999, physics results were just above the national average but results in biology and chemistry were low. In lessons, attainment is in line with national expectations at the end of Key Stage 3 and generally above expectations at the end of Key Stage 4. Attainment is in line with expectations for A level, in most sixth form lessons. Progress in science is good throughout the school.

- *Art*

18. Students' attainment in art at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with national expectations. In lessons at the end of Key Stage 4, while attainment is close to national expectations, there is little high level work. GCSE results are below average. A small number of students take art in the sixth form. Attainment among current sixth formers is in line with expectations for A level but recent examination results have been below average. Students make satisfactory progress across Key Stages 3 and 4 and good progress in the sixth form.

- *Design and technology*

19. GCSE results for technology subjects overall are in line with the national average. Students achieve better results in food technology and textiles than in other aspects of technology. Results in resistant materials were below the national average in 1999 and in electronics results were very low. Results in other technology subjects were broadly average. Attainment in lessons at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with national expectations, and at the end of Key Stage 4 is a little higher than this because more emphasis has been placed on design principles. Students make satisfactory progress across Key Stage 3 and progress a little better across Key Stage 4.

· *Geography*

20. Attainment at the ends of Key Stages 3 and 4 is below national expectations in geography, but closer to expectations at the end of Key Stage 4. GCSE results in geography are consistently below the national average; girls usually do better than boys. Attainment in sixth form lessons is below expectations and A level results are well below average. Progress is satisfactory in lessons and across Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 4 lessons, progress is too frequently unsatisfactory. Sixth form students make satisfactory progress in lessons but progress over time is less secure as some lack appropriate study skills.

· *History*

21. Overall results at GCSE and A level in history are below national averages. In both examinations, while results at the higher grades are below average, results across the full range of grades are broadly average. GCSE results in 1999 were depressed by a misunderstanding of coursework requirements. At the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, attainment in lessons is in line with national expectations. In sixth form lessons attainment is below expectations. Progress is generally satisfactory across all key stages but performance in examinations is held back by weaknesses in writing among younger students and in evaluation skills among older students.

· *Information and communication technology*

22. GCSE results in 1999 were below the national average. Relatively few students achieved the higher grades, although results across the full range of grades were broadly average. In 1999, the single entrant for A level computer studies obtained the highest grade, but AS level results were below average. Sixth form results fluctuate markedly, year by year. Information and communication technology is separately taught at Key Stage 3, at the end of which attainment is in line with national expectations. Attainment in lessons at the end of Key Stage 4 is too uneven because only students following the GCSE course benefit from systematic teaching of information and communication technology; overall attainment is below expectations. Sixth form students work in line with course expectations on the combined A/AS level course. Access to computers is good in many subjects and in the library; however, the use made of information and communication technology is patchy. Progress across Key Stage 3 is satisfactory, while progress across Key Stage 4 is unsatisfactory when account is taken of the many students who do not benefit from a systematic approach to the subject. Progress in the sixth form courses with an information and communication technology component is satisfactory.

· *Modern foreign languages*

23. While GCSE results in French and German were below the national average in 1999, the overall trend in results is of marked improvement. A higher proportion of students take the GCSE examination than is usually the case. In lessons at the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is below expectations overall, with standards in writing and listening better than in speaking and reading, which is the least developed skill. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is broadly in line with national expectations, with writing skills being better than other aspects of language. Students make satisfactory progress across Key Stages 3 and 4. Progress is good in the sixth form. In lessons, attainment is in line with expectations for A level. In 1999, students obtained average results in A level French, although results were well below average in German.

· *Music*

24. Attainment in music at the ends of Key Stages 3 and 4 is below national expectations, although a minority of students attain in line with expectations at both key stages. GCSE results in 1999 were well below average. Students enter the school with weak backgrounds in music and overall make satisfactory progress across Key Stages 3 and 4. Attainment in sixth form lessons is in line with course expectations and students make good progress in lessons. In recent years, the numbers entering A/AS level examinations have been small and, while most have attained pass grades, overall results have been below average. Students enjoy participating in a wide range of extra-curricular activities which assist their progress in performance, as well as strengthening links between the school and its local community.

· *Physical education*

25. Attainment in physical education is above national expectations at the ends of Key Stages 3 and 4 and above expectations in sixth form lessons for students studying at A level. Results in both GCSE and at A level are above the national average. Students progress well in all key stages. The school has a justifiably good reputation for the performance of its many school teams in a range of individual and competitive sports. Many students have attained success at county and national levels.

· *Religious education*

26. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is just below the standards expected in the locally Agreed Syllabus. In lessons at the end of Key Stage 4 it is in line with expectations, but results of the first students entered for GCSE in 1999 were well below the national average; however, for several individual students these results represented a good achievement. Progress is good in lessons.

· *Vocational courses*

27. Students' overall results in GCSE business subjects are above average; they do particularly well in business and economics. Results at the end of sixth form GNVQ courses are above average for business at advanced level and, while below the average for courses at intermediate level (business, science, health and social care), some students who gain units rather than full awards successfully re-enter in the following year. In lessons at the end of Key Stage 4, students attain above expectations on courses in GCSE business subjects. Attainment in sixth form lessons on the GNVQ business course at advanced level is generally above expectations. On intermediate level courses attainment is broadly in line with expectations. Progress is good in all years.

· *Trends*

28. The overall trend in results at GCSE is of marked improvement. Up to 1998, the trend was rising at a slower rate than the national average, but in 1999 a substantial improvement lifted the results and the school was named as one of the 100 most improved schools in the country over the last few years. Overall, results of boys and girls are similar at GCSE. Results are much better than at the time of the last inspection. Students generally do well in English literature, drama, food technology, modern foreign languages, physical

education and business and economics. Results in art and design, resistant materials, electronics, geography and information systems are not as good as in their other subjects. Results at A level have not improved since the last inspection: they are broadly similar. Results for individual subjects fluctuate year by year because numbers of students entered are often low. Results in drama, physics and physical education are generally high. The school has maintained success in GNVQ business (at advanced level) over several years. The school makes systematic use of targets to improve GCSE and A level results, both across the whole school and for individual subjects.

Attitudes, behaviour and personal development

29. Students' good attitudes to their work and their good behaviour in lessons contribute significantly towards the quality of learning and teaching, and are much improved since the last inspection. At the time of the last inspection, learning was satisfactory or better in about two-thirds of the lessons and in the rest it was unsatisfactory. The reasons for unsatisfactory learning were mostly poor motivation, lack of interest in learning and poor behaviour. Attitudes and behaviour are now good, overall. Students' response in lessons was satisfactory or better in 95 per cent of lessons overall and good or very good in 60 per cent. Standards of behaviour in lessons are similar among boys and girls.

30. Students respond well in lessons. They are nearly always committed, interested and attentive. Enjoyment is evident among students of all ages in many drama and physical education lessons, as well as in their independent use of computers, both in the library and when directed in lessons. Their keenness to respond to teachers' questions was apparent in many subjects. Sixth formers, particularly, often take the initiative to formulate their own questions, using appropriate terminology, to further their understanding. For example, in a Year 13 business and finance lesson, students asked thoughtful questions about the current state of the country's economy. Most respond well to opportunities for independent study and develop the capability to research and plan, for example, through work in history, design and technology and on vocational courses. Where opportunities are provided, students exhibit developed skills of creativity and reflection, for example in art and religious education. In some instances, students lack confidence in their own performance, for example in speaking in French or German. In art, students are helped to overcome their diffidence through structured discussion in lessons for younger students and *critiques* for sixth formers. Students respond well to opportunities for independent problem solving which are frequently evident in English, mathematics, and coursework for examinations.

31. Behaviour in lessons is good. Students conform to the code of conduct and are mutually co-operative, supporting a classroom ethos which is conducive to learning. The majority work hard and concentrate on what they are asked to do. In a small number of instances behaviour in lessons is less than satisfactory, and these mostly reflect weaknesses in teaching, for example when activities lack interest, or the teacher's expectations of work or behaviour are not sufficiently clear. Most of the unsatisfactory behaviour was in music and mathematics, but there was restlessness and a little poor behaviour in geography.

32. Behaviour is satisfactory outside lessons. In circulation and public areas and across the site, most students show awareness of others' presence, conduct themselves in an orderly manner and are helpful and friendly. In the grounds, which are extensive, there is a little roughness and immature behaviour. The school property is treated with care. The number of fixed period exclusions is about the same as at the time of the last inspection. Most of these are for failure to accept school discipline; matters such as rudeness and other unacceptable behaviour are dealt with by exclusion for one or two days. There has been

only one permanent exclusion in the last school year (compared with two at the time of the last inspection) and this was for persistent and serious offences. Procedures for monitoring exclusions are sound.

33. Relationships among students and between students and teachers are good. Mutual respect is clearly evident. Students collaborate well in pairs and small groups during lessons, showing care for each other and respect for each other's feelings, values and beliefs. They generally show courtesy to others, both on and off the premises, when assignments take them outside the school.

34. Students' overall personal development is satisfactory. Most students, sixth formers particularly, have a well-developed sense of responsibility and take initiative, for example in playing music at events both within and beyond school, and representing the school in competitive sports. They show concern and responsibility towards others through interest in charities. Older students show responsibility towards younger students and work with them on themes such as bullying, through group work in drama, and other topics in the personal and social education programme. Students cope well with residential trips away from home.

35. Students with special educational needs display the same positive attitudes as other students. Many take an active interest in their own learning and enjoy using computer programs. They develop good relationships with the special needs staff and appreciate the support they are given. Students with special needs are very well accepted and in some cases benefit from help given by other students.

Attendance

36. Students' attendance has deteriorated since the last inspection and is now unsatisfactory, being below the 90 per cent threshold; it is poor in Year 11. Unauthorised absence is above the national average, due to truancy, or insufficient or no reason for absence being notified by the parents. The main reasons for authorised absence are illness, the particular circumstances of a few students and, in a small number of cases, holidays during term time. The absences are widely spread, though a small number of families, known to the education welfare officer, contribute heavily towards the total number of absences. The progress of the students who do not regularly attend is adversely affected by the interruption in their learning.

37. Punctuality at morning registration is erratic: too many students arrive a few minutes late. Students arrive late at some lessons, partly due to the walk between the blocks. However, lessons usually start on time.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

· Teaching

· 38. The quality of teaching is very much better than at the time of the last inspection. Then, only about two-thirds of the lessons were satisfactory or better in the main school, and three-quarters post-16. Now, teaching in 96 per cent of lessons is satisfactory or better, in about 60 per cent of lessons teaching is good or better, and in 19 per cent of lessons teaching is very good, or occasionally excellent. Teaching is unsatisfactory in only four per cent of lessons. The quality of teaching in lessons is best in the sixth form (where all teaching is satisfactory or better and three-quarters is good or very good) and a little better at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. Teaching is always at least satisfactory in English, drama, science, art, history, physical education, religious education and on vocational courses, including business subjects. In drama, art, and some technology subjects there is a significant proportion of very good teaching. The school has invested a great deal of energy in improving teaching, and has been successful: it is now generally good throughout the school.

39. Teachers use their knowledge well to provide a wide range of interesting activities and to help students progress. For example in English, teachers draw on their very good knowledge of literature to involve students in researching the meaning of quotations, which deepens students' understanding of the text and of characters in books they are studying. In drama, teachers' very good subject knowledge enables them to ask excellent questions which challenge GCSE students to think about the characters they are creating and how to portray them. Teaching in modern foreign languages benefits from several native speakers, who use their knowledge skillfully. In a sixth form lesson, for example, the teacher's natural facility with French and personal knowledge of public opinion in France was used well to develop students' participation in a discussion on contemporary world issues. Effective use is made of commercial software programs to help students with special educational needs to improve. Teaching on vocational courses, including business, is strengthened by teachers' direct experience of the work place. Teachers in several subjects (including art, design and technology, geography, history, modern foreign languages and on vocational courses) are confident users of information and communication technology, which is effectively used to research and present subject information.

40. Teachers' expectations are generally high of students' behaviour and attainment, which promotes their progress well. In physical education, for example, expectations are clear, as in a swimming lesson with Year 8 students where tasks were vigorous and demanding throughout the lesson and enabled all students to make good progress in the butterfly stroke. In a games lesson with Year 11 students, clear direction enabled students to improve their passing, dribbling and shooting skills. In design and technology, teachers' high expectations are reflected in good quality coursework, for example, in food technology and in the model boats made in resistant materials. Expectations are likewise often high, or very high, in sixth form lessons as evident, for example, in drama, art and the level of discussion in modern foreign languages. Searching questions are asked in A level physics lessons; the level of challenge in physics is greater than in other science subjects at A level. The expectations of students with special educational needs are clear and help them to progress towards the targets of their individual education plans. Where teachers do not know students well, then expectations can be low and not insisted upon. A tendency to overlook or not consistently correct weaknesses in written work allows students to leave work unfinished, with errors in spelling, grammar and presentation.

41. Planning for lessons is good, on the whole. The introduction of a simple strategy for planning for students of different levels of attainment (what students must, should and could learn) is effective: on the whole, work is appropriately adapted for students of different levels

of attainment. This strategy is less frequently used in mathematics and science than in other subjects. Work is broken into small steps to help students with learning difficulties to improve. In a few instances, higher attaining students are insufficiently challenged – for example, there are few opportunities for extended reading in modern foreign languages. Teachers use a wide range of methods and activities. In mathematics, concepts such as number are explored in a variety of ways, and students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning and evaluate their progress. In religious education, classes are well organised, students participate in a variety of practical tasks and most progress well in acquiring knowledge and understanding. Discussion is effectively used in sixth form lessons to involve students and raise their understanding, for example of tactics and aggression in physical education, the nature of Tudor protests in history, and economic concepts in the GNVQ advanced level business course. In art, the very well judged questions posed by teachers in sixth form *critique* sessions assist students both in gaining confidence and also in developing strong personal styles. Very occasionally approaches used limit students' learning. For example, in some information and communication technology lessons too much talking by the teacher prevents students from making the most of their time with the computers.

42. Relationships are good and students are mostly well managed in lessons. Occasionally difficulties arise when students do not respond to new teachers. But school expectations are clear and well understood, especially among older students. The few incidents of poor behaviour almost invariably result from inappropriate activities, which lack interest for students. During the inspection these were observed in geography, music and occasionally in mathematics, and accounted for nearly all of the unsatisfactory lessons seen. Time is generally well used in lessons. Teachers usually maintain a good lesson pace, which moves students on in their learning, as in most science and the majority of French and German lessons. Resources are well used, on the whole.

43. Teachers mark work regularly and the school system of grades gives a helpful indication to students of how they are attaining, especially at Key Stage 4. The lack of any direct link to National Curriculum levels in marking at Key Stage 3 obscures specific guidance to students on what they should do to improve. Informal feedback in lessons is good. Teachers' comments, for example in drama, art and music, give good guidance on how to improve. On vocational courses, assessment is very well used: the course expectations are clear, consistently used in lesson planning and understood by students. They, in turn, understand what is expected and this helps them to improve. Homework is regularly used by teachers. On the whole, the amounts set for the youngest students and examination groups are suitably challenging, although other students are sometimes asked to do too little. Variation in teachers' expectations of the volume to be completed is the probable explanation of the different views expressed about homework by parents. Inspectors observed many students, younger ones especially, studying individually in the library. A few students do not complete or follow up inadequate homework.

44. At the time of the last inspection, teachers' command of their subject was generally good, and it remains so, now. Planning was very variable and work sometimes lacked challenge. Both planning and expectations are better, now. At the last inspection, the ability of teachers to control certain groups was unduly variable. While incidents of poor behaviour occasionally detract from lessons, in the vast majority of cases teachers manage students well and students enjoy learning in lessons. Teaching is much improved.

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• **The curriculum and assessment**

Curriculum

45. The curriculum provides good breadth and balance at Key Stage 3. Both information and communication technology and religious education are separately taught at this key stage. Extra time is given to English in Year 7, which helps students to improve their basic skills, including reading and spelling, although attention given in English to writing is not reinforced consistently across other subjects. The use of number is generally well taught within mathematics. Numbers, graphs and ideas about shape are used in other subjects, but sometimes ineffectively, because there is no consistent approach across the curriculum. The school is aware of the inconsistency and an audit of numeracy skills across the curriculum is taking place.

46. Curricular breadth and balance at Key Stage 4 are satisfactory. The system of subject choices is good, with opportunities to build on students' strengths, for example by studying two arts subjects. A good range of business subjects is included, and certificates of achievement are offered alongside GCSE in several technology subjects. When only a few students choose a subject, it is usually provided in lessons after school, though this is not a popular arrangement among students. Weaknesses at this key stage are the lack of religious education and the incomplete coverage of the National Curriculum in information and communication technology (except for students who have chosen these subjects for GCSE). Many subjects use computers in their work and students gain valuable practice, but their experience is uneven. In physical education, only girls learn dance, and boys do not have this opportunity, which is inequitable. No vocational qualifications are offered pre-16.

47. For the size of the sixth form, the choice of A level subjects is reasonably wide, and offered alongside a narrow range of vocational courses. Overall, students' success on vocational courses is better than on A level subjects. The school is reviewing the sixth form arrangements to bring them in line with national changes post-16, and to improve students' success. The vocational courses (business at advanced level, science, business and health and social care at intermediate level) are well organised, with assessment arrangements reflected in curricular plans. Links with employers greatly enrich the curriculum in the sixth form. All sixth formers participate in an enhancement programme, including personal and social education, pre-driving skills, first aid, careers education and optional physical education. Sixth formers appreciate the curricular opportunities the school provides. Their sixth form council organises occasional social events and support for charities, but apart from sports functions there are few regular extra-curricular activities. The Grange (a converted mansion within the school grounds) is used for many sixth form lessons and as a social base for A level students. GNVQ students are based in the main school, where information and communication technology facilities are good.

48. Arrangements for grouping students according to their level of attainment allow teachers to plan suitable work, and assists students' progress. Curricular plans in subjects are mostly good. In virtually all, National Curriculum requirements are met and plans show a variety of approaches for students at different attainment levels. However, planning for music at Key Stage 4 is insufficient, and relies too heavily on the published syllabus.

49. Personal and social education is well planned and effective throughout the school. A suitable range of topics is covered, including study skills, themes linked to citizenship and work, and coping with bullying. Work in science and physical education contributes to drugs awareness and to health and sex education, and older students participate effectively as responsible role models. Careers education is appropriately covered in each year, including the sixth form. Students have access to guidance material in the library (books, leaflets and

careers education software, especially). They benefit from individual interviews with careers officers in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. All students have two weeks' well-organised work experience in Year 10 and students on sixth form vocational courses have work experience and work-shadowing opportunities. Briefings, assignment booklets for use on work experience and debriefings are helpful and enable the students to draw on their experience at work to help their overall progress.

50. Links with the main feeder primary schools are good. Joint work on the curriculum has fostered links in subjects including information and communication technology, design and technology, science and physical education. The school is on the threshold of starting basic skills work with local primary schools (as part of the Education Action Zone programme) which will strengthen links further in English, mathematics and information and communication technology. Links with employers and local universities help to raise students' attainments and aspirations. In 1999, 37 students went on to university. Students with low reading ages are helped to improve through daily reading lessons. Planning for students with special educational needs is effective in the lower attaining classes. Those with the greatest need receive extra support in lessons by learning support assistants who focus well on the targets of students' individual education plans.

51. Extra-curricular activities are good. A wide range of physical education activities, including competitive games and swimming, is available. In music and drama, regular activities and practices are complemented by preparation for major productions – such as *Annie* during the inspection. Clubs in many subjects enable students to improve their subject skills. At lunchtimes, younger students participate in a range of games and social activities organised in their year bases. The learning zone, about to be reinstated, was a popular and valued feature of the school. Many parents feel that this after-school facility brought enormous benefit in helping their children to develop independence in learning and to improve the standards of their work.

1. Overall, satisfactory improvements have been made in the curriculum since the last inspection, but a number of weaknesses remain. Sixth form vocational courses have been successfully established but the range is narrow. While a little drop-out occurs among students on A level courses, the drop-out is not as high as at the last inspection. Religious education has still not been provided for all, at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. National Curriculum requirements in information and communication technology are now met at Key Stage 3, and the school is working on plans to implement requirements across Key Stage 4. Good use is made of time in personal and social education lessons. Option group arrangements provide a balanced range of opportunities at Key Stage 4. At the time of the last inspection, not all students studied a foreign language at Key Stage 4: now all study one and have the opportunity to study two. The school is endeavoring to improve language provision substantially, through external funding and its language college plans.

52. *Assessment*

53. In Key Stage 3 all subject areas apply the agreed school policy of awarding a global grade to reflect effort, homework, conduct and progress, but they are free to operate whichever assessment techniques they choose. Some departments, including the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, use systems which keep students well informed about their National Curriculum levels, and all subjects areas are required to provide a National Curriculum level on the annual written report. The global grades are collected and fed into a database, and the information is given to heads of year and form tutors so that they can follow up cases where effort is below expectations. It is also provided

to the senior management team and to subject area leaders, who are able to identify low attaining students and the higher attaining students within their subject, and to use information to assist in curriculum planning. Assessment procedures are good at this key stage. A strength is the overview they provide of students' attainment and progress. However, in subjects where little reference is made to attainment relative to the National Curriculum, an opportunity is missed for involving students in improving the standards they achieve by giving them the information they need to do better.

54. Assessment arrangements are good and well used at Key Stage 4. A similar system of grading is applied, and is supplemented by a further grade for each piece of marked work which equates to GCSE grades based on assessment criteria for the subject. The collated information includes students' grades in Year 10 and also Year 11 mock examinations, so that a clear line of progress can be tracked for each student in each subject. This information is well used to predict both probable and possible GCSE grades, and to inform mentoring discussions which take place at regular intervals and are used to check progress and set targets for improvement.

55. Assessment in the sixth form is also thorough and frequent. It is an integral part of the GNVQ courses and students following A level courses have half-termly reviews of their progress. Good use is made of national comparative information in these reviews. Marking is always based on the examination criteria relevant to the subject. As a result, sixth form students know how well they are doing and what they must do to improve.

56. In almost all subject areas, analysis of test and examination results is used to inform curriculum planning, for instance to amend schemes of work in the light of student performance in different components of GCSE examinations. The school has launched a 'Common Standards' programme which initially allowed teachers to see how work is marked in other subject areas, and is now the basis for regular departmental checks on the application of the school's marking policy. This has improved standards so that feedback to students is more likely to contain advice on how to improve their work, though there is still some inconsistent practice, within and across departments. Students contribute to their own assessment by writing comments which are included in their reports, based on guidance they receive as part of their personal and social education programme.

57. Procedures for the assessment of pupils with special educational needs are thorough. These students are identified from primary school records and they have the opportunity to attend for an additional induction session prior to entry. There are regular twice-yearly reviews with a high level of attendance by parents of students on Stages 3 to 5 of the Code of Practice. Reviews take place just after the issue of interim reports, which makes them more effective.

58. The previous inspection report noted good procedures which were then comparatively new, but also that there was inconsistency in matching departmental to school policies, with some resulting confusion for students. There was substantial unmarked work in the sample provided for inspectors. Marking is now mostly up to date, and increased use of computer technology has improved both departmental and school systems so that they are far more beneficial to students in their learning.

52. **Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

59. The school has a clear mission statement and a well-developed code of behaviour.

The ethos is positive and teachers care about the welfare and personal development of the students. Relationships are good within the school. Many, but not all, departments have spiritual, moral, social and cultural development policies and some clearly identify relevant issues and possible enhancements of the curriculum in their schemes of work.

60. Spiritual development is good in religious education, as well as in art, drama and English. Religious education lessons include opportunities for reflection and meditation; one lesson during the inspection started very effectively with a 'stilling' exercise. Particularly good opportunities are provided in art at A level where personal projects reveal a depth of awareness. English and drama, through literature and reflection, enable students to think about their own experiences as well as those of others. A key issue in the last inspection was non-compliance with the statutory requirement for a daily act of worship and the provision of religious education at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. No improvements have been made in these respects. The newly instituted religious education GCSE course extends opportunities for the spiritual development of the students involved and assemblies (which students attend once each week) reflect on current concerns or moral issues. During the inspection a sixth form assembly given by a speaker from a children's charity was clearly appreciated. An appropriate record of assembly themes is kept. No regular opportunities are provided for reflection in registrations or form times.

61. Moral development is good. The school clearly helps students distinguish right from wrong. The behaviour policy is well considered; rewards and sanctions are appropriate. Teachers are good role models and contemporary moral issues are discussed in a range of curriculum areas. The personal and social education programme is good. Particularly good practice was noted in modern foreign languages where sixth formers discussed AIDS and the developing world. Religious education tackles a number of issues facing our society, and science and geography enhance these by reflecting on pollution and the environment. Ethical issues are well developed in history and one interesting lesson focused on a discussion of the dilemmas facing the captain of the ship as portrayed in the film, *The Cruel Sea*. English makes full use of literature, for example *To Kill a Mocking Bird* and *Lord of the Flies*, to stimulate discussion on moral issues.

62. A satisfactory variety of opportunities is available for students to take responsibility, and citizenship skills are developed through year councils and the organising of events to raise money for charity. Some students help in reception, others at parents' evenings or with information and communication technology facilities. School students are representatives on the Harwich Town Youth Council. Older students help younger ones. Sixth formers contribute to the sex education programme for Year 9 through a research scheme run by Exeter University, and Year 9 students write stories that they share with primary pupils. Sixth form drama students help younger students in tackling issues like bullying and peer pressure. In some subject areas (including religious education and drama) students are being encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning by doing research and sharing it with others. Year 11 students have a 'prom' committee, run a tuck shop and help produce a newsletter.

63. Overall, students' social development is good. Group work in class is particularly effective in science, religious education and physical education. Year 8 tutors each take their form on social trips designed to develop relationships within the group (for example to the skating rink in Colchester). Year 7 students all go to the theatre in Ipswich. In each year group a residential opportunity is planned to encourage a broadening of attitudes, as well as to enhance the teaching programme; the trips include field work in history, geography and foreign language exchanges. Successful entries in technology competitions encourage personal and social confidence as well as public speaking skills. Within the extra-curricular provision there is a good range of sports, music and drama activities. Activities co-ordinators

provide a variety of opportunities at lunch time and a number of departments make specialist rooms available to students. The much appreciated learning zone in the library will be reinstated in January 2000 after a year's break. Students speak warmly of the help they have gained through this and the various opportunities to use computer facilities in departments. Students are encouraged to relate to the local community. Through drama, art and music, students contribute to community arts projects. Effective links with the local community provide a good range of work experience placements. Art and music departments work well with local community initiatives.

64. Cultural enrichment is not particularly easy to achieve in this isolated area but students do make trips into London to museums and art galleries and there are theatre visits. School productions and the commitment of teachers mean that a good range of cultural activities and opportunities for the appreciation of art, literature and music are available to all students. Multi-cultural enrichment is afforded through the curriculum particularly in religious education, drama, music, art and modern foreign languages. Widening of cultural awareness is apparent in most departments including mathematics, where Egyptian and Roman numerals are studied, and in science, where a multi-cultural quiz highlighted the achievements of scientists throughout the world. Appreciation of different life-styles is developed through visits abroad, including France, Germany and Russia (Belarus).

65. Since the last inspection the school has maintained its commitment to the personal development of its students although there are still statutory issues to be addressed; not enough is done to enhance students' spiritual awareness.

52. Support, guidance and pupils' welfare

66. The school places effective emphasis on the provision of a supportive environment, it is firm and caring in the support and guidance it gives students, and the pastoral arrangements are well managed. All these factors have positive effect on students' learning. New entrants settle in quickly. Tutors know their students well as individuals, as they stay with them until Year 11 and are responsible for teaching them personal and social education; most of the lessons observed included structured activities to support students' welfare or study skills. All of the teaching was satisfactory or better and in half the lessons the teaching was good, occasionally very good.

67. The school provides good support and guidance to its students. A clearly structured careers' guidance programme is integrated into personal and social education; students and their parents acknowledge that the school works well to provide students with effective support when making decisions. Other aspects of guidance on issues such as bullying, drugs awareness and sex education are also covered in the personal and social education programme, which benefits from specialist contributions, including the local health promotion team. Good support is given to students with special educational needs and they progress well on the whole. They benefit from a weekly social skills lesson and, for students with identified needs, an anger management programme. External agencies which work with the school to support students' learning include the behaviour support team, education welfare service and family consultation service.

68. Arrangements for monitoring students' progress and personal development are good. Systems include teachers' assessments, progress reports, Records of Achievement and, for students with special educational needs, regular assessments in line with the Code of Practice. Assessment arrangements on vocational courses are very good and provide regular feedback to teachers and students. Lines of communication between subject

teachers, form tutors and heads of year are clear. The school has good information on the progress and behaviour of students. Monitoring of those about whom there is concern is specific and appropriate.

69. Requirements for recording and reporting attendance are met. The computerised system of registration enables up-to-date statistical information to be used to analyse patterns of absence. The staff show a good awareness of attendance matters. Systems are in place for following up absent students, involving senior staff, heads of year and the education welfare officer. However, the procedures are not good enough to obtain satisfactory attendance. The governors, quite rightly, have plans to adopt a rigorous approach with a 'first-day response' and record of attendance in students' planners, to improve attendance. A late book is kept at the school reception but strategies do not ensure satisfactory punctuality at morning registration; too many students arrive a little late.

70. The school has placed strong emphasis on promoting discipline and good behaviour and now has a clear, structured reward and sanction system which is consistently applied by most staff in lessons and understood by students. Rewards include merits in personal organisers, leading to certificates and vouchers, which are valued by students. Sanctions include the well-organised and effective referral system (students causing disruption in a lesson are referred to a teacher on duty), which, if often used, leads to appearance before the governors' advisory panel and, ultimately, to exclusion. Difficult students, and instances of bullying, are dealt with very firmly. Heads of year keep a register of concerns and a file of sanction forms for monitoring purposes. Staff presence in public and circulation areas is effective in maintaining an orderly environment.

71. The school bursar is responsible for managing health and safety. He has good awareness of safety issues and works hard to ensure that all procedures and the policy are adhered to. Good progress has been made in addressing the health and safety issues identified in the previous inspection report. The school has good procedures for dealing with accidents and fire drills to ensure pupils' safety, and the welfare staff offer appropriate first aid and good support. Child protection procedures are in place and staff have satisfactory awareness of the issues involved.

72. Good features of the school's support and welfare arrangements reported at the last inspection have been maintained. Effective improvements have been made in monitoring arrangements, which are much more thorough now, both for monitoring students' academic progress and also their behaviour. The governors' advisory panel is a very effective part of the behaviour support system. At the time of the last inspection, concerns about disciplinary procedures and poor behaviour were highlighted in the report. Weaknesses have been tackled effectively and effective systems are in place which ensure generally good behaviour.

52. Partnership with parents and the community

73. The school provides a range of well-presented information for parents. The prospectus is easy to read and includes all statutory information, except for national A level results. The governors' annual report to parents is helpful and attractive but does not include all the statutory information (GCSE targets and information about the next election of parent governors are not included). The school keeps parents informed about the activities and life of the school through newsletters, including a Year 7 newsletter. Frequent interim and annual reports keep parents informed about their children's progress, as do consultation meetings to discuss progress. Parents are well satisfied with the information they receive.

74. The school encourages parents to become involved in their children's work. Homework diaries act as a means of communication between the home and school. Parents help with school visits and trips. Many are involved in drama productions and some offer work experience placements. They have strongly supported the school's bid for language college status. However, support for the parent-teacher association has dwindled and it no longer exists.

75. The school has very productive links with local businesses which support students and enrich the curriculum. Many local firms offer placements for work experience and both the Key Stage 4 and GNVQ students regularly visit companies. Business mentors help Year 11 pupils in improving their social and study skills. Many industrial partners have worked closely with the school in joint planning for the new Education Action Zone and in the school's bid for language college status. Planning for both is focused on raising students' attainment and on target-setting.

76. The school makes very good use of the wider community in enhancing students' experiences and understanding. Students benefit through educational visits, including exchange visits to Russia, France and Germany. Visitors, including the clergy, police, fire brigade and health workers, support the personal and social education programme and GNVQ courses. The head of Year 7 has a clear and well-planned liaison programme with a number of local primary schools to ensure the smooth transfer of students and support for them in their new secondary school. The Coastal Confederation of Schools works together effectively on staff training and various support issues, including the sixth form. This helps the school in improving the curriculum as well as in extending opportunities for staff development.

77. At the time of the last inspection, links with parents, primary schools, the coastal schools and local community, including businesses, were well established. The school has built on these links and recent initiatives, including the work for the Education Action Zone, and the bid for language college status, have created a sharp focus on raising attainment. Improvement has been good.

52. THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

52. Leadership and management

78. Leadership of the school is strong, highly principled and committed to improving the quality of teaching, and to working in partnership with the local community to extend learning opportunities. Teamwork is very effective among senior managers, who provide a range of skills and interests. The aims of the school, to raise achievement and improve basic skills, are well reflected in its work. Since the last inspection, GCSE results have improved substantially. The headteacher has led the school very effectively in working with local partners to establish the Education Action Zone, the first priority of which is to improve basic skills, starting in the local primary schools. The staff handbook and staff briefings inform all staff of procedures and policies.

79. Monitoring of the work of the school is a strength. The school has made very effective use of consultants to assist in monitoring and to advise on improving teaching. Quality teams, including senior and middle managers, work with heads of departments to monitor, support and advise on classroom practice. Pastoral teams are also supported by quality

teams. Arrangements for assessing students' work provide systematic information on their progress. A regular cycle of meetings, including senior and middle managers and all staff, ensures consultation and discussion, which focuses on raising attainment, improving learning opportunities and the quality of teaching. Recent discussions provide a secure basis for improving literacy, information and communication technology, planning for the variety of students' needs and provision for modern foreign languages. Overall, the quality of teaching is much improved since the last inspection. Monitoring directly informs plans for staff development which, for individual teachers, are agreed with the head of department. These many good features have served the school well, in improving GCSE results and the quality of teaching: the focus has been on achievement in the main school (Years 7 to 11). Relatively little attention has been focused on the sixth form, where examination results have not improved as much as at GCSE. The school is aware of the need to place more emphasis on post-16 arrangements, and curricular improvements are planned for the year 2000.

80. School development planning is systematic and thorough. Planning at school level builds on subject plans and all staff are involved: the process is democratic, open and effective. Good progress has been made on recent plans, for example for lesson observations, behaviour management and the reading initiative. Arrangements for target-setting for individual students to improve GCSE results have been strengthened and plans are being monitored and evaluated so they can be further improved. The school has a good sense of its strengths and weaknesses and makes effective use of staff development to effect improvements; aspects of the school development plan address literacy, numeracy and low attendance, for example. Planning to raise the attainment of students is detailed and thorough, particularly at Key Stage 4.

81. Leadership in most subjects is effective and promotes high standards; leadership in drama is very effective. Satisfactory curricular planning and co-ordination have been maintained in design and technology by temporary management arrangements and good teamwork, and a permanent head of faculty has now been appointed. Leadership and co-ordination of information and communication technology have suffered, however, because of the prolonged absence of a key member of staff, and planning to meet National Curriculum requirements through work across subjects at Key Stage 4 lacks rigour. Leadership and management of learning support are good. Arrangements are in line with the Code of Practice and effective use is made of students' individual education plans. The co-ordinator of sixth form work is relatively newly responsible for this aspect of work and has already contributed to plans for improvements in the curriculum and overall achievement.

82. Governors have high expectations. They are well informed about the work of the school through their meetings, information provided by the headteacher and direct links with departments. They contribute effectively in many practical ways. Their initiative to improve behaviour – the governors' advisory panel – has been very effective.

83. Relationships in the school are good, the atmosphere is purposeful and in most lessons students work well. The ethos is positive. Statutory requirements are met, except in the provision of religious education (at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form) and information and communication technology (at Key Stage 4). Collective worship is not provided daily and not all of the required information is included in the prospectus and governors' annual report.

84. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, overall. Marked improvements have been made in the quality of teaching, in students' behaviour and attitudes to learning,

and in GCSE results. The strong leadership, effective partnership with the governing body and systematic planning, including target-setting, equip the school well to maintain further improvements. The last inspection report included the key issues listed below:

Identify and disseminate the best teaching and classroom management practice. Develop and implement a programme of staff training to improve both teaching techniques and skills as well as pupil behaviour and engagement in lessons.

Extensive and effective use has been made of external consultants and of monitoring by the school staff. This issue has been tackled well: teaching and students' behaviour are much better than at the time of the last inspection.

Review the current disciplinary procedures and, in conjunction with the above action point, strive to reduce the number of pupils excluded from school and from individual classes.

Governors have worked very effectively with school staff to improve procedures. Overall improvement is very good. Few students are asked to leave lessons. Only one student was permanently excluded in the last school year.

Follow through evaluation of achievement with effective action such as target-setting.

Monitoring is systematic and rigorous. Effective use is made of targets to improve results overall and target-setting has recently been extended to improve the performance of individual students. This key issue has been tackled well.

Implement more rigorously the present assessment policy by monitoring staff marking and pupils' work.

Assessment arrangements, including marking and the consistency with which information is used, are good.

Review the organisation and teaching of information technology and implement fully the National Curriculum requirements.

Several improvements have been introduced, including substantial upgrading of computing facilities. National Curriculum requirements are now met at Key Stage 3 but planning and assessment across Key Stage 4 are insufficient to ensure that all students have their entitlement at this stage. The school is about half-way through a programme of improving opportunities at Key Stage 4.

Review the size and structure of the senior team and plan the future staffing needs of the school.

The senior team has been reduced from eight to five. Overall, staff are well deployed and overlapping responsibilities reported at the last inspection no longer exist.

Include in the school development plan more sharply focused success criteria and update regularly completion and advances made to help monitor progress.

The school development plan is well organised, sharply focused and is monitored. This issue has been tackled well.

Work further towards complying with the requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils and meet the legal requirements with regard to teaching religious education in Years 10-13.

No progress has been made on these issues.

Address the statutory and health and safety issues raised in the pupils' welfare and accommodation sections of the report.

These matters have been rectified.

52.

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

52.

Staffing

85. The school is adequately staffed by committed teachers who are well qualified. Teachers' qualifications and experience generally contribute well to students' attainment, and to particularly good effect in drama and physical education. The turnover of teachers, although not excessive, has been steady since the last inspection. Adverse changes have fallen disproportionately on the music department and have affected the continuity of provision. Long-term absence by a minority of teachers has affected the continuity of learning in information and communication technology and the range of provision in design and technology, for example in electronics.

86. The number of educational support staff is above the average for the size of the school. Learning support for students with special educational needs contributes positively to students' progress. Science technicians and library staff are well qualified and experienced and bring benefits to students' learning. Other staff with responsibilities in reception, administration, catering and caretaking are friendly, helpful and efficient. They contribute well to the ethos of the school.

87. The induction arrangements for newly qualified teachers and those new to the school are good. They feel well supported at whole-school and departmental levels. Senior members of staff help them become familiar with the school's procedures. The arrangements for appraising staff have been superseded by the school's rigorous programme of monitoring, both of teaching and learning. The initiative to improve students' learning includes monitoring by senior and other staff to assess the standards in teaching and learning and determine relevant training needs. Recent courses have included information and communication technology training and help in producing schemes to encourage students to learn independently, for example in mathematics. Support assistants for students with special educational needs benefit from training through local authority programmes and links with other schools. These opportunities focus effectively on ways of strengthening the progress made by students with special educational needs. The school participates in the training of teachers and in joint courses with other schools through the Coastal Confederation of Schools; this benefits professional development.

88. Arrangements have improved since the last inspection report which judged that in-service training should be more closely linked to improving teaching and learning. The whole-school approach to monitoring of teaching and learning, which is the basis for improving standards, also identifies school, department and individual training needs. The overall improvement in teaching and examination results reflects the success of the arrangements.

52.

Accommodation

89. The school's accommodation is more than adequate to teach the curriculum and is better than at the time of the last inspection. The school enjoys much good specialist

provision. Very good facilities for physical education, enhanced by use of the local swimming pool, have a very positive impact on standards of attainment. Modern foreign languages enjoy spacious accommodation with good access to information and communication technology. Art is taught in well-equipped rooms, with computers, a kiln and dark rooms, providing a good range of facilities and a stimulating environment. The attractive and well-appointed library is centrally located, houses a careers library and provides students with good access to computer facilities; it effectively supports the work of the whole school. There are some weaknesses. The textiles room is small so that some classes have to be split. The two main computer rooms are too small so that students have to share machines, which limits practical experience. These rooms are also poorly ventilated so that temperatures are sometimes too hot to work comfortably. Since the last inspection, the school has improved access to information and communication technology within subjects by locating suites of computers in most areas of the curriculum; plans are in hand to provide a small stand-alone system for sixth form students in the Grange (the sixth form house). In spite of these generally good facilities, mathematics needs more access to computers. The security of the site has been improved. Structural faults and health and safety concerns mentioned in the last report have been rectified.

90. The attractive but separate sixth form accommodation, the Grange, provides tutorial rooms and a social base for A level students. GNVQ students make little use of the Grange; they are based with access to good computer facilities in the main school. Near the buildings there is a problem with litter; but it is quickly removed. Facilities for display have been improved and most subject areas make effective use of displays of students' work to enhance the learning environment. Display of key words is good in all areas. Displays in the central areas and corridors, some of which are drab, provide a clear picture of the work and achievements of the school.

52.

Learning resources

91. Overall, the availability and quality of books and equipment are good, in subject areas and in the library. The library and resources area provides a good source of information for students of all ages and a pleasant, business-like working environment. Students appreciated the learning zone arrangements, which extended individual learning opportunities after school hours, and which are about to be reinstated. The number of computers available is better than average for the size of the school. Access is good for most subjects, and they use them well, as do individual students. A limitation is the dispersed arrangement of the buildings; for example, access to computers for A level students is not easy at the Grange, but about to be improved. The school makes effective use of local resources, for example for water sports and through participation in community arts events.

92. At the time of the last inspection, there had been recent expenditure on resources. Since then, equitable arrangements for funding departments have maintained good levels of learning resources. The number of computers and their quality have greatly improved.

52. The efficiency of the school

93. Financial planning is good. The approach to planning is systematic. Budget planning reflects school development planning; for example, good account is taken of the resource implications of school improvement initiatives, as in the change in the sixth form curriculum from September 2000. Planning in subjects is well-focused on the main priority of raising achievement.

94. Staff are well deployed to teach to their main strengths. Staff development and monitoring have improved the quality of teaching markedly since the last inspection, although continuity has suffered in some subjects because of staff changes and absence due to ill health. Time is used well in lessons, but too many students arrive a few minutes late at the start of the school day, in spite of warning bells before registration. Effective use is made of non-teaching staff in many areas. Governors have supported the move towards activities co-ordinators at lunchtimes, rather than mid-day supervisors so that students, younger ones particularly, participate in a range of constructive activities. The librarian manages the library effectively and this is well used, including its computers, for individual work by students. Most subject areas benefit from access to computers and these are effectively used to improve standards in subjects, although the range of information and communication technology skills developed by too many students in Key Stage 4 remains narrow. Overall, the school makes effective use of its learning resources.

95. The accommodation is spacious, on a large site, not all of which is fully used, although the cost of maintaining the whole site is met by the school. Effective budgeting has ensured satisfactory maintenance, repair and decoration of the buildings. Most subject rooms are grouped so that access to resources is good. The sixth form house, the Grange, is an historic and attractive building which is held in affection by some students and staff, yet it is a drain on resources and perpetrates a division between A level students (who use its facilities) and students on vocational courses (who are based in the main school). Rooms at the Grange are small for classrooms. Overall, it is an expense in a school which already has spacious accommodation and is operating at well within the capacity of its buildings.

96. Funding, received both for special educational needs and for inservice training, is fully and appropriately used, and provides good value for money. Students with special educational needs make good progress; nearly all leave school with a GCSE certificate. The school has benefited from external funds to improve computer facilities, which are now good. Progress in implementing plans to provide the National Curriculum in information and communication technology through work across the curriculum has been slow, due to staff illness and resulting changes.

97. Financial control is good. Governors regularly scrutinise the budget and school staff use a computerised monitoring system. The bursar assists senior staff in budget planning and monitoring, and in seeking best value, for example in buildings maintenance and cleaning. At the time of the last inspection, the school was judged to use its money well, and this is still the case. At that time, it was judged to offer value for money in the way it used its resources, but it was felt that the value would increase further if there were a decrease in the number of lessons where there was underachievement. This is not a general problem now. Bearing in mind the amount of money coming into the school, which is average, the attainment of students coming into the school, which is below average, the generally good quality of teaching and the standards achieved by the end of Key Stage 4, which match the national average, the school provides good value for money.

52. PART B: CURRICULUM AREAS AND SUBJECTS

52. ENGLISH, MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE

52. English

98. At the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999, the results in National Curriculum tests in English were below both the national average and the average for schools of similar intake. Results have fluctuated over the past three years. Girls do better than boys. Results in English in 1999 were not as good as those in mathematics, and similar to those in science. At the end of Key Stage 4, the proportion of students achieving the higher grades (A*-C) in the 1999 GCSE examinations in English was well below the national average and the average for schools of similar intake. Results across the full range of grades (A*-G) were in line with the national average. Girls did better than boys, as is the case nationally. Results have remained similar over the past three years, though there was a slight improvement this year.

Students did not do as well in English at GCSE in 1999 as in science, and when compared with national results performance was similar to that in mathematics. In English literature, the proportion of students achieving the higher grades (A*-C) was a little below the national average and not quite as good as in 1998. However, the number of the very highest grades (A*) achieved was higher than in any other subject in the school. Students do better in English literature than in most of the other subjects they take. At post-16, results in the 1999 A level examinations were well below the national average. Usually they are average across the range of pass grades (A-E). In 1999, a significant minority of students just failed to achieve an E grade.

99. In lessons and work seen at the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is below nationally expected standards. Students speak clearly to one another in groups and to their teacher, though not always in standard English, when its use would be appropriate. They listen well. Students read fluently, understanding what they read. Although lower attaining students read more slowly, they sometimes use lively expression to convey direct speech. Students write in a range of forms – such as business letters asking for a bank loan, newspaper articles, poems based on metaphors and discursive writing on fox hunting, experiments on animals and bullying. Students can compare the film of *Lord of the Flies* with the novel and give a personal view. There are weaknesses in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Sentence links, such as 'and', 'so' and 'but' are used too repetitively. Vocabulary is limited, except in the work of higher attaining students. The style of writing does not always suit the occasion, with middle and lower attaining students writing as they speak. However, the content of work is often imaginative, and writing on books and poems which students have studied, is well informed. Computers are well used to word process final drafts and produce spreadsheets for railway timetables, in the unit of work on travel.

100. In lessons and work seen at the end of Key Stage 4, students' attainment is below national expectations in English language but in line with these in literature. Standards are better than suggested by the 1999 GCSE results because of strategies introduced to improve writing skills. Students speak at greater length, justifying opinions. For example, a Year 11 class, taking the roles of villagers, discussed the pros and cons of allowing a pop music festival to be held in the village; they gave opinions from the standpoint of farmers, shopkeepers and teenagers. Students listen carefully to one another in groups and to their teachers. They read their literature texts with an eye for detail and grasp essential meaning.

While higher attaining students appreciate subtleties such as irony, lower attaining students take words at their face value. Students continue to write in a variety of forms, developing sustained writing on literature. Difficulties with spelling, punctuation and grammar persist,

though paragraphing and sentence structure improve. Vocabulary is sometimes too imprecise – using words such as ‘nice’ and ‘get’, for example – to convey the intended meaning forcefully. Students write sensitively on *Othello* and *Of Mice and Men*. The writing of higher attaining students is impressive on the poems of World War One and on creative topics such as *My Dream Holiday*.

101. In lessons and work seen at post-16, students’ attainment is below expectations of A level work. Students can advance an argument and respond to others’ points of view in group work. They read challenging texts such as Joyce’s *Dubliners* and Chaucer’s *The Franklin’s Tale*, understanding plot and character. The content of work is satisfactory. Students write sympathetically about the Fool in *King Lear* and Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* (Chinua Achebe). But in writing, points are not always well argued, and they are insufficiently supported by telling quotations. Examples of careless spelling and loosely constructed sentences detract from the overall quality of work and its effect.

102. Students, including those with special educational needs, make good progress overall at Key Stage 3 in speaking, listening and reading, from levels of attainment which are generally low on entry in Year 7. Progress across Key Stage 4 is satisfactory in English language and good in literature. Progress across the sixth form is satisfactory. In individual lessons in all years progress is often good, sometimes very good. Students learn to present talks to the class and to listen while others perform. Lower attaining students, including those with special educational needs, benefit from the very good support they receive; students on the reading improvement programme make good progress. All students develop wider reading skills and learn to appreciate fiction and non-fiction in the weekly half-hour of silent reading enjoyed by Key Stage 3 students. A number of strategies are in place to address the slower progress of students in writing. For example, a commercial software program is helping lower attaining students to improve their literacy standards. Helpful emphasis is placed on glossaries, key words and drafting, which is beginning to impact on standards in writing. In Key Stage 4, students make good progress in responding to literature. They learn to put themselves in Bidley’s shoes in *Great Expectations*, and to see the Gargery household through her eyes. They learn to reflect on the horrors of trench warfare in Owen’s *Dulce et decorum est*, and to feel for Candy when his dog is shot, in *Of Mice and Men*. At post-16, A level students are encouraged to consider carefully the words of essay titles.

103. Students’ attitudes to English are good. In lessons, their response is at least satisfactory in all lessons, good or better in three-quarters, and very good – occasionally excellent, in Key Stage 3 – in over a third. Most students show interest in their work and concentrate hard. In a few lessons, they become restless if they are not actively involved in learning. Behaviour is usually very good. Students are polite and co-operative, though a small minority call out in class and try to monopolise teacher time; this limits progress. In group work, students collaborate effectively, respecting the views of others and taking responsibility for their own learning. For example, in one Year 11 class, students planned a group presentation on a war poem and, in another, they prepared a schedule for a television news programme for children. In both lessons, students worked hard, showed well-developed independent learning skills and made very good progress. Relationships are very good. Students in the sixth form show commitment to their studies and a desire to do well.

104. Teaching in English is good. It is at least sound in all lessons, good or better in over three-quarters and very good, occasionally excellent, in a third. Teachers have good subject knowledge which enables them to help students to improve their language skills and read more widely. They have high expectations of behaviour and achievement. For example, in a

Year 7 lesson, students were learning to plan an essay on *The Tempest* and to support points by relevant quotations. The teacher's careful explanations led to very good progress. Teachers plan lessons thoroughly. An interesting variety of activities captures and maintains students' interest. For example, in a Year 9 lesson within a unit on *Leaflets, Letters and Travel Writing*, students studied brochures, estate agent sheets, rail-timetables and maps, wrote to an imaginary Russian penfriend and prepared an itinerary of visits to places of local interest and to London. The teacher provided a good quantity of relevant resources and students were closely involved in their task. Teachers manage students efficiently and relate well to them, so little time is lost in lessons. They use group work effectively as, for example, when a Year 11 class pooled ideas for an oral assessment and written coursework on *Of Mice and Men* and a different group in the same year planned a response to a proposed pop music festival in their village. Teachers' careful monitoring and helpful support sheets enable students to learn more effectively. Teachers frequently assess progress in lessons, through well-focused questioning. They regularly set homework as a natural extension of class-work. The marking of written tasks is very good. Most work has very helpful and detailed comments to help students to improve. Appropriate attention is paid to correcting technical errors.

105. The English curriculum is well planned to give a broad, balanced coverage of the subject. Information technology is effectively employed to improve the presentation of students' coursework. Provision to raise attainment in reading is good. Learning support assistants work with students in one-to-one sessions during the week, and their expertise is helping to raise standards. All students in Key Stage 3 have half an hour of silent reading as part of their English studies. Lower attaining classes have access to a commercial software program to improve literacy. The schemes of work provide secure continuity and progression, with emphasis on basic skills to improve standards in writing. The literacy management group, representing subjects across the curriculum, is focusing on strategies to address weaknesses. Assessment procedures are very good and effective use is made of data to inform planning. For example, the reading records of Year 6 students are used as a basis for dialogue and work schemes for Year 7; Key Stage 3 and GCSE results are analysed to measure if students have achieved as expected. Emphasis is strong on the literature of other cultures, such as *To Kill a Mockingbird*, writings by Selvon, a Trinidadian author, and *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry*.

106. The head of department gives strong leadership and has encouraged a very good team spirit within the department. She monitors closely the work of English teachers and has, with the support of her colleagues, introduced many initiatives to raise standards in writing, and the attainment of boys in particular. The increase in the use of non-fiction, media texts and a variety of structured tasks within a lesson are specifically targeted at raising boys' attainment. It is too soon to evaluate fully the impact of such strategies, but the signs are that standards are beginning to rise.

107. Response to the last inspection report, and the recent consultant's report, has been good. Attainment is similar overall to that at the time of the last inspection, though it is better in literature at GCSE level, but not as good at post-16. More advanced reading skills – for example, skimming and scanning – are well promoted in the school's many strategies to raise attainment in reading. Although weaknesses in writing skills remain, initiatives are in place and starting to have an effect. Critical skills are much more sharply developed. Attitudes and behaviour have improved significantly. The main weaknesses identified – those of securing full class attention and of raising boys' attention – have been tackled well.

52. *Literacy*

108. The school has worked hard to improve standards in reading through the reading improvement programme; students' progress is good, from generally low standards of attainment on entry. The literacy management group is looking at ways to improve writing skills. In English, students speak clearly, though not always in standard English when they should do so, and listen well. They read fluently and with understanding in English. They write in various forms. Though the content of written work is satisfactory, there are weaknesses in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Opportunities are provided in various lessons for students to practise skills in speaking, listening, reading and writing. Speaking skills are generally satisfactory and most students are confident speakers. In mathematics, there are good opportunities for students to explain methods of solving problems and they respond in extended answers. In music and drama, students evaluate performance, and they voice opinions in religious education. Students discuss and explain their work in some art lessons. For example, in a Year 8 class, students confidently presented to the class their ideas for shop logos and others formulated interesting questions on what had been said. In some subjects students speak only briefly. For example, in science and geography, teachers' questions demand only short responses. There is little opportunity for role play, or student-to-student exchanges in modern languages, and no attempt to build up conversations, except at A level. Listening skills are generally good. Students listen well to one another in groups, and to teachers' instructions, though occasionally they are inattentive.

There are opportunities to practise reading skills in a number of subjects. Poems are read in music and instructions in mathematics, science and art. In geography, there is little reading for information. In modern foreign languages, there is very little use of texts and reading is the weakest skill. Written work across the curriculum is marred by an unacceptable number of basic errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Vocabulary is limited and sentence structure unvaried. In some subjects, for example geography and mathematics, spelling is uncorrected. Students find writing much more difficult than reading, and there are insufficient strategies, such as the use of writing frames, to support students. In modern foreign languages, however, writing develops well from paragraphs in Year 7 to more extended writing at Key Stage 4. Spelling is well supported, but grammar rules are poorly applied and understood. In art, there are good written evaluations of artists, and in drama at Key Stage 4 and post-16, students write evaluations of their own performances in well structured essays.

52. *Drama*

109. In the 1999 GCSE examination, the proportion of students achieving the higher grades (A*-C) was above the national average. Boys did better than girls. Boys' results were high compared with the national average for boys. In 1999, results were not quite as high as in 1997, but better than in 1998. Students do better in drama than in nearly every other subject. At post-16 in the 1999 A level examination, results were well above the national average and significantly improved on the 1998 results, particularly at the higher grades (A and B).

110. In lessons and work seen during the inspection, the attainment of students at the end of Key Stage 3 was in line with the national expectation. Students improvise short scenes in groups, showing an awareness of characterisation. Occasionally, they lack the breadth of vocabulary to develop a character fully. Group interaction is effective. Students use space well and respond to cues appropriately. Voice projection is sometimes a weakness. Students evaluate performance orally and understand the impact of gesture and facial expression in conveying emotion.

111. The attainment of students at the end of Key Stage 4 is well above expectations and in line with the attainment indicated by the 1997 GCSE results. Students evaluate group performance concisely and accurately, and enter into an improvisation quickly. They create a character convincingly and make very effective use of voice and body language. Written coursework, while not as good as practical work, is still above average. Students write fluently about their work and reflect on difficulties they have overcome. They discuss the motivation of characters – for example, of Alan in *Equus* - though ideas are not always sufficiently developed. Files of work are well organised and work is very well presented, sometimes using computers.

112. Attainment at post-16 is well above expectations for A level work. Students speak clearly, make excellent use of space and show a keen awareness of their audience. They discuss, negotiate, and make reasoned decisions about performance, and have well-developed skills of analysis. They organise themselves efficiently in rehearsal, making excellent use of time. Written folders contain a good variety of work, including notes on drama through the ages and well informed essays on improvised drama, and on how plays reflect society.

113. The progress of students, including those with special educational needs, across key stages and in lessons is good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4 and post-16. Students learn to work as a team, to plan performances and to pay careful attention while others perform. As they move up the school, they develop a style of oral and written evaluation that focuses on the key skills of drama. They learn about different approaches to theatre, for example those of Pinter, Brecht and Stanislavsky. By the time students reach Year 13, the standard of written coursework is well above average.

114. Attitudes to drama are very good overall, and excellent in Year 11 and at post-16. Students enjoy drama. It is a very popular subject at Key Stage 4; nearly half the Year 11 group have opted to study it. Concentration is often very good, though younger students find it harder to concentrate for long and a few become restless. Behaviour is very good; it is excellent in Year 11 and at post-16. Students collaborate very effectively in groups and can be trusted to rehearse sensibly. Students are very supportive of one another. For example, in a Year 11 class, individuals helped one another in pairs and in larger groups to build up a scene from a series of linked actions. In a Year 13 group, students rehearsing for a public performance listened carefully to one another's ideas and acted upon constructive criticism. In both these lessons, strong teamwork led to excellent progress.

115. Teaching in drama is very good. In nearly half the lessons it is excellent. Teachers have very good subject knowledge which enables them to pose telling questions and to help students improve the quality of their work. Teachers have high expectations of what students can achieve and this challenges students, including those of lower attainment, to tackle demanding tasks. Planning is very good. Teachers prepare for a variety of activities and maintain a very brisk pace. For example, in a Year 11 group, the lesson began with a brief evaluation of the previous lesson to help students focus on performance. Students planned and prepared a series of paired improvisations, each improvisation being followed by an evaluation from both the teacher and the students. Class management was excellent and students' involvement sustained throughout the hour. High standards of behaviour are encouraged, though very occasionally younger students chatter while the teacher is giving instructions, and this limits progress. Very occasionally, students are inappropriately grouped for evaluating performance and their response is not as good as it could be. On-going assessment in lessons is closely linked to student evaluation and is well used by the

teacher to check what students have learned. Relationships between teachers and students are very good.

116. Schemes of work provide a wide experience of drama for students, and make a valuable contribution to the speaking and listening component of the National Curriculum for English. The work in lessons is enriched by regular rehearsals and public performance. Teachers continuously search for innovative responses to examination requirements. For example, an A level group in Year 13 rehearsed a challenging house play in which the audience follows the actors through the large house, as the students present brief scenes in various rooms. Assessment is regular and accurate. The head of department is an experienced external examiner and his expertise benefits the work of the department. He gives very strong leadership and closely monitors and supports the work of colleagues. He has developed very good links with primary schools. For example, students have visited primary schools with a presentation on bullying. Accommodation is generally adequate.

117. Response to the last inspection report, and the consultant's report, has been good. Examination results, teaching and response, already good at the time of the last inspection, are even better now. Key Stage 3 schemes of work are being revised, and whiteboards used more consistently to consolidate learning. Given the commitment of teachers to raising attainment even higher, and students' very good attitudes to their work, the capacity for further improvement is good.

52. **Mathematics**

118. Results of the National Curriculum tests in mathematics at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 were in line with the national average and above the average when compared with similar schools. Students' performance in mathematics was better than in English or in science. Girls performed better than boys, which was the reverse of the pattern in 1998. Since the last inspection report there has been an overall trend of improvement in GCSE results and in 1998 the results were close to the average when compared with all schools. However, in 1999, the proportion of students gaining the higher grades, A*-C, dipped to well below the average when compared both with all schools nationally and with similar schools. Results across the whole range of grades, A*-G, were below the national average. The dip was in part due to a group of students being entered for inappropriate GCSE papers which were too difficult, and also because a minority of students had gaps in their learning, due to regular absence. Students' performance in mathematics was not as good as in science at GCSE and was broadly similar to that in English. Although the results at A level remain below the average for all schools they have substantially improved during the last three years.

119. In lessons and in the work seen at the end of Year 9 students' attainment covers a wide range and, overall, is in line with the national expectation at the end of Key Stage 3. Students have an understanding of number and carry out arithmetical operations with two-digit numbers and to two places of decimals with satisfactory accuracy. Students from the middle attaining sets use their understanding to find percentages of quantities and those who attain highly are sufficiently skilled to find percentage error between actual and estimated measures. Ideas of perimeter and area of shapes are understood but only the higher attaining students use formulae effectively in calculating them. Students interpret and illustrate data using graphs and pie charts and determine representative values. Higher attaining students consider relationships between data by using scatter graphs. At the end of Key Stage 4, students are more skilled in number operations and use their skill to generate terms of sequences using formulae. Students of higher attainment use their secure

algebraic skills to solve equations, for example they factorise quadratic equations. Overall, attainment is in line with expectations in lessons at the end of Key Stage 4. In the sixth form, students use a variety of trigonometrical formulae to good effect when finding angles, lengths and areas in two-dimensional shapes, but overall attainment is below expectations for A level.

120. The attainment of students when they enter the school is below average overall: basic numerical skills are weak and students have poor knowledge of multiplication tables. Progress across Key Stage 3 is good, overall. In lessons across Key Stages 3 and 4 progress is mostly satisfactory or better; it is good in about one-third of lessons and unsatisfactory in a small minority. The rate of students' progress is closely linked to the quality of teaching. Lower attaining students, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in basic number skills and understanding of angle and shape using commercial software programs. For example, Year 8 students in a lower attaining set made good progress in understanding the vocabulary related to linear mathematical sequences and how sequences can be represented using formulae. A wide range of interesting activities is used effectively to capture students' imagination and help them understand mathematical ideas – for example activities based on a millennium clock, or a mail order catalogue – as well as self-assessment, to help students understand how well they are doing. Occasionally, tasks are not challenging, the questions posed by the teacher lack focus and students do not make sufficient progress. Poor behaviour affects progress in a small minority of lessons, especially among older students. Progress in lessons and across Key Stage 4 is satisfactory overall. Students benefit from the time given to revision before examinations. A group of Year 11 students responded well to small-group activities involving structured discussion, based on past examination questions, and made good progress. In the sixth form, progress is satisfactory. The development of learning in some lessons is hindered by students' poor recall skills, for example, techniques for integration and differentiation.

121. Students' response to mathematics is satisfactory overall: it is good or very good in a little under half of the lessons and unsatisfactory in a small minority. In most of the lessons in the sixth form, students' response is good or very good and it is never less than satisfactory. Most students display an interest in their work and concentrate well. They form constructive relationships and work well together in groups; they discuss how to solve problems, listen to each other's contributions and often explain their methods to the whole class. Their active participation effectively raises their self-esteem and their confidence in the subject. In the sixth form, students confidently explain their methods of solving more complex problems to their peers. When tasks are not planned to meet the learning needs of all students, then behaviour is unsatisfactory, as observed among more than half of the students in a Year 10 class. They displayed little interest, did not follow instructions and distracted others by calling out loudly, which affected the progress of the whole class.

122. Teaching is satisfactory overall; it is good or better, and occasionally excellent, in almost half of the lessons but there is a small minority of unsatisfactory lessons. It is better in Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form than at Key Stage 4. Teachers have good subject knowledge, which they use effectively in lesson planning. They creatively use a variety of tasks and activities that reinforce and challenge students' learning. These help to raise confidence levels, as well as positively impacting on students' progress and response to learning. For example, a group of Year 8 students, when investigating patterns of recurring decimals, not only raised questions relating to standard form, but also were introduced to rational numbers; they found the tasks stimulating. Weaknesses occur when students are given tasks that offer little challenge, and time in the lesson is wasted. Procedures for assessing students' progress are good. Assessments are used to monitor progress and to

identify weaknesses in learning. Students evaluate their own learning and set themselves targets to improve their levels of attainment. High quality topic boxes, although not fully completed, have been produced by the teachers to help students to improve and extend their learning. The topics cover a wide range of levels and areas of mathematics. Marking of students' work is thorough and up to date. The best marking includes constructive comments to help students improve, and consistent use of grades that inform students of their progress. Although homework is set regularly to extend the work of the lesson, not all students complete the work set.

123. The department is very well led. The head of the department leads by example and generates a good team spirit. Teachers work hard and all are committed to raising the attainment levels of all students. Substantial progress has been made in the priorities identified in the department's development plan. The system of monitoring of teaching and learning is rigorous, but not yet shared by all teachers. Schemes of work are well planned and the changes made to the sixth form curriculum have resulted in improved examination results. The curriculum is enriched through projects and visits. For example, a group of students reached the final round in the Millennium Challenge and a regular visit to a local oil refinery enables students to see how aspects of their A level studies are used industrially. Information and communication technology is used effectively with lower attaining students to improve their levels of numeracy. The department does not have any computers. Access to the school's machines is insufficient and this seriously limits students' learning and experience in using spreadsheets and databases.

124. The response to the last inspection has been very good. All examination results have improved. Although some weaknesses remain in teaching, overall substantial improvements have been made due to rigorous monitoring. Schemes of work have been extensively reviewed and improved with more, though still insufficient, opportunities for students to use computers. High-quality work cards covering a wide range of topics have been produced to facilitate students' own learning. Progress has been made in the audit of numeracy skills, although a whole-school policy is not yet in place.

52. *Numeracy*

125. Standards of numeracy cover a wide range and are adequate overall. Calculators are used competently and, generally, appropriately. Graphic calculators are used effectively in the sixth form to generate sequences when determining divergence or convergence. A commercial computer program is used at Key Stages 3 and 4 to improve students' levels of numeracy. This is having a positive impact on numeracy levels, as well as students' enjoyment of handling numbers, but has yet to be fully evaluated to measure the impact on students' mathematics learning overall. Although work is in hand to improve numeracy skills across the curriculum, no systematic programme is in place, so opportunities are uneven and depend on the work which individual subject teachers plan. Some subject areas make effective use of number. In science at Key Stage 3, students carry out simple number calculations to find density and effectively interpret and illustrate data using graphs and pie charts. In geography at Key Stage 3, students use measures and scale and in the sixth form they use statistical techniques when analysing data. In history graphs are produced from charts using computers and this positively impacts on students' learning. Measurement and scale are used satisfactorily to help develop spatial awareness in three-dimensional drawing in art.

Science

126. In 1999, the results of National Curriculum tests in science at the end of Key Stage 3 were below the national average but in line with the average in schools with a similar intake. Girls' results were better than those of boys, having improved steadily over the last three years. In 1999, the results in science were lower than in mathematics but broadly similar to those in English. The results in 1999 represented an improvement: up to 1998, results at the end of the Key Stage 3 in science had been below results both in English and mathematics. At the end of Key Stage 4 the proportion of students gaining the higher (A*-C) grades in GCSE examinations in 1999 was above the average both for all schools nationally and for schools having a similar intake. Results in 1999 were significantly higher than in 1998. Students did better in science than in English and mathematics, particularly in gaining the highest (A* and A) grades. In the sixth form, A level results have fluctuated widely over the last three years, but results in physics have generally been high; in 1999 they were just above the national average, but results in biology and chemistry were low. In the General National Vocational Qualification (GNVQ) at intermediate level in science, results were good in 1998 but dipped in 1999, when they were adversely affected by the poor attendance of a minority of students.

127. In lessons and the written work seen during the inspection, students' attainment towards the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with the national expectation. Almost all students can distinguish metals from non-metals by means of their properties, but a few have difficulty in recalling the full range of properties. Attainment in lessons is a little higher than in the National Curriculum tests because students are beginning to benefit from recent improvements to the Key Stage 3 curriculum. At the end of Key Stage 4, students' attainment in lessons is above the national expectation, reflecting the results of GCSE examinations. For example, in Year 11 almost all can spot results that do not fit the pattern of other results when they investigate osmosis in potatoes; higher attaining students begin to speculate about possible reasons for unexpected results.

128. Students make good progress across Key Stages 3 and 4. In Year 7, their attainment is below the national expectation; for example, most are unable to use correct scientific terminology in describing the properties of a liquid, using instead terms such as 'runny'. However, by Year 11 they use terms such as 'electron' to explain the flow of electric current through a wire. Students with special educational needs make similar progress to others. Students learn across Key Stage 3 the main differences between plant and animal cells, and begin to group elements on the basis of their properties. Across Key Stage 4 they make good gains in understanding how structural differences explain observed differences in properties. Students handle laboratory equipment carefully and safely but, in Key Stage 3, have too few opportunities to carry out investigations. They are encouraged to develop their numerical skills from an early stage in Year 7, for example, when they use simple numbers to calculate density or draw bar charts to show numerical relationships, but their writing and information technology skills are not systematically developed. In lessons, progress is mostly good, reflecting the generally good quality of teaching. For example, Year 7 students with low levels of attainment made good progress when they investigated the solubility of substances; Year 11 students of average attainment progressed well in understanding factors affecting the rate of a chemical reaction.

129. In the sixth form, students' attainment is in line with expectation for A level in physics but below this in biology and chemistry. Overall, students make good progress in almost all their lessons, but in some biology and chemistry lessons a minority is not well enough motivated to accept the high workload that leads to success at A level. The attainment of intermediate GNVQ students is in line with expectations for their course and they make good progress in their lessons, but some do not attend regularly and are unlikely to gain the full award.

130. Students behave well in lessons, often demonstrating their enjoyment of science through their enthusiastic response to teachers' questions. They concentrate well throughout the full length of lessons and co-operate well with each other during practical and other work. GNVQ students work well independently, for example when they research information in the library or from the Internet.

1.Science teaching is good. Teaching in all lessons is at least satisfactory, and it is good, sometimes very good, in more than four out of five lessons. Lessons are well planned, providing a variety of activities that engage and maintain students' interest. In the sixth form, GNVQ assignments often make good use of the school's local context, for example when students work on the extraction of sugar from beet. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use it well to give clear explanations, often relating lesson content to students' own experience, as in Year 10 when the teacher started a lesson about fuses by demonstrating a selection of familiar household appliances. A key feature in students' good progress across both key stages is emphasis on key words. In most lessons, words and concepts are clearly displayed in laboratories, providing a visual stimulus to help students associate words with their meanings, for example 'element' and 'compound' in Year 9. Teachers usually ensure that higher attaining students are appropriately challenged, as in Year 9 when they were encouraged to estimate the size of cells they had viewed under the microscope; however, in some A level lessons lack of challenge is a weakness. Students' work is regularly checked, though marking is inconsistent. Teachers' comments are sometimes detailed and set targets for improvement but, too frequently, students' work is acknowledged with a tick and comment is limited to a word or short phrase.

2.The department is well led and teachers work together effectively as a team, committed to raising standards further. The scheme of work is well planned and provides a good framework. The laboratory technicians provide a very good service in support of teaching. Although students have ready access to information technology equipment, its use is not yet firmly embedded in the science curriculum. Teachers keep detailed records of students' attainment and progress. They regularly inform students of their attainment, relative to National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades, yet they make little use of information on students' attainment to set clear targets for improvement. Since the last inspection, the results of National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 have remained broadly similar, but GCSE results have improved significantly. In the sixth form, students continue to gain a wide range of grades with marked differences between subjects and in overall performance between one year and the next. The department has benefited from the help of an outside consultant and this has resulted in a significant improvement in teaching.

132. **OTHER SUBJECTS OR COURSES**

132. **Art**

1.GCSE results in art in 1999 were below the national average, although results have improved over recent years. A small number of students take A level art in the sixth form. Results at A level in 1999 were below average, but most students obtained a pass grade.

2.At the end of Key Stage 3, there is a wide range of attainment, but overall attainment is in line with national expectations. Students' knowledge, understanding and skills in the subject are in line with expectations. Their use of subject-related vocabulary is satisfactory, but written work showing students' knowledge and understanding of the styles and work of artists is limited. This aspect of the subject is below expectation, overall. However, in class

the standard of contextual work and oral evaluation is good, for example students present their design studies to the rest of the class, inviting constructive criticism. Year 9 investigate the work of well-known artists through the analysis of selected post-card reproductions. They describe two contrasting approaches to figure painting, and draw the compositions, transferring lines and shapes in the correct proportions. However, their written appraisals of the paintings are weaker. Students' practical work, in terms of their knowledge and use of the art elements, including line, tone, pattern and colour, and their drawing from observation, are in line with national expectations. At this key stage work is carried out in a broad range of media, and students communicate their ideas imaginatively in two- and three-dimensions. Students understand how negative and positive shapes give contrast to a pattern. When designing and making monochrome tiles, Year 7 students build up card shapes in relief and take prints from their blocks showing good control in the use of printing rollers and inks. Year 8 students use the department's computers competently in work on lettering styles, as part of their graphics work.

3. Overall, attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is close to national expectations, but there is little high level work. At the end of Key Stage 4, students use the art elements reasonably well in their practical work, with pattern quality being the strongest feature. The higher attaining students make effective use of colour to convey mood, and of tone to suggest form, and space. Often the themes set are not fully explored or exploited by students, resulting in somewhat uniform solutions to otherwise exciting tasks. For example, all students used similar lettering and flat pattern layouts for a poster design entitled *Illusion*. Their understanding of composition was weak, and the resulting posters lacked originality and impact. Sketchbooks are used to record processes, and the development of ideas, but productivity is poor, and developments show limited thought, with little annotation to indicate changes. Research into the work of artists and art movements is inadequately exploited, and the use of techniques and styles of other artists are insufficiently used as a vehicle in the development of students' own ideas. The personal study skills of many are underdeveloped, and few have a clear knowledge of the syllabus aims and objectives, or the examination assessment criteria. However, there is a satisfactory range of two- and three-dimensional media in practical work, and materials are used carefully, for example in mixing colour imaginatively.

4. Although the results of A level students have been below the national average in the past, the quality of current practical work is in line with expectations for A level. Students work in an exceptionally wide range of media and follow course objectives well. Most practical projects develop from precise observational drawing (for example, of hands), and move in several different, yet connected directions through varied media to abstract, or semi-abstract, original and highly imaginative interpretations. Students have made a good start to their written personal studies, demonstrating very good research techniques and development of ideas. Some relate their chosen study to the arts and architecture of the locality, for example to the Electric Palace, a listed and restored early cinema in Harwich.

5. Through Key Stage 3, students' progress in art is satisfactory, from levels of attainment which are low at the beginning of Year 7. Satisfactory progress is maintained through Key Stage 4. Through both key stages students' practical skills and understanding develop well but written work, including evaluation, remains weaker. The number of students taking GCSE is just above average for the size of the school but decreasing, with more lower attaining students taking the subject. The work of A level students represents good progress through the course and very good progress in lessons, where there are many opportunities for students to measure their attainment against that of their peers. Evaluation techniques, include helpful presentations of their work to other students (in *critiques*) inviting them to identify areas for improvement.

6. Most students are keenly interested in the subject, and enjoy the tasks set, often listening intently to teachers' introductions to lessons. Art materials are used with care and economy, and respect is shown for the work of others. Many students are willing to talk at length to their teachers and peers about their work, and this has improved self-confidence generally, including among those with special educational needs. Good working relationships have been built up through this process. Confidence in self-expression through artwork is, however, not so strong for a significant number of students. This is especially noticeable in Key Stage 4 work, where some students cling to preconceived notions, rather than show initiative through the development of original ideas and creativity. Students are developing good skills of self-evaluation, especially in the sixth form, where study skills and personal target-setting are more developed.

7. Teaching is good, overall. It is never less than satisfactory, and there is some very good teaching in one in three lessons. Teamwork is good. Teachers have worked together to provide interesting courses, with clear aims and objectives that cover the National Curriculum at Key Stage 3, and the examination requirements at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Teachers have good subject knowledge, which collectively includes expertise in a wide range of two- and three-dimensional media, with personal interests in photography, cinematography, and computer-aided design. Teachers' expectations of students are generally high, particularly in the sixth form, although in some Key Stage 4 lessons work which lacks refinement: is sometimes accepted too readily. Teaching strategies are varied, hold students' interest, and provide very good learning and assessment opportunities. For example, the concept of a critical friend, in peer evaluation sessions, promotes progress through the pairing of students of differing attainment. All art materials and research aids are well organised, and good use is made of the one-hour lessons. Homework is appropriate, and is regularly set and marked with the majority, but not all, books have written comments that show students how to improve. The department's marking scheme and record keeping are adequate, but teachers in the classroom do not make enough use of the National Curriculum descriptors for the subject. Timing of activities and written target-setting are used effectively to advance learning, but students are not made aware of national standards at Key Stage 3.

8. The department is well led, and teachers are committed to raising standards in all areas. They share ideas, working together effectively in team-teaching situations. There has been a positive response to the last inspection report, with an improvement in standards overall. Students' progress is satisfactory, and the review of their work is now a strength. Further development of teaching strategies is an area for improvement, specifically to improve results at Key Stage 4. Development plans have identified priorities, and the department now has the capacity to make good progress towards the targets set.

140. **Design and technology**

9. GCSE results for technology subjects overall are in line with the national average at the end of Key Stage 4. Students achieve better results in food technology and textiles than in other aspects of technology. No students were entered for graphics in 1999, and results in the previous year were low. Results in resistant materials were below the national average in 1999 and in electronics results were very low. Results in other technology subjects were broadly average. Design and technology subjects are not provided in the sixth form, although there are curricular and staffing links with GNVQ courses (reported in the Vocational Courses section).

10. Attainment in lessons at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with national expectations, overall. Students have adequate understanding of the design process. Their practical skills are stronger, on the whole, than their understanding and appreciation of design principles. In lessons, students attain in line with expectations for their age. Year 7 students can identify potential risks in practical areas, for example the use of electrical tools. Students in Year 8 use basic tools safely in preparing food dishes and have satisfactory skill in joining fabrics. Year 9 students successfully design and make ties in a variety of fabrics. Students have a good range of opportunities for handling metals. Year 10 students use hand-tools well in making chisels and metal screwdrivers. They understand the principles of casting metals, well illustrated through teacher demonstration of sand-casting aluminium. They handle tools and machinery very well to shape wood and plastic. Some students can produce an electronic circuit, for instance of a random number generator. Attainment in food technology is above average. Students work to high standards and use time well in preparing final dishes based on individual designs. They appreciate the importance of presentation and colour in the final product. In lessons, overall attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 is a little above national expectations. Understanding of design principles is relatively more secure than at the end of Key Stage 3. Students' practical skills are good, sometimes very good. Written work compiled during lessons and in homework too frequently contains inaccuracies and sometimes is not presented well. Much more care is taken with examination coursework, which is generally satisfactory.

11. Students make satisfactory progress across Key Stage 3 and progress a little better across Key Stage 4 because they make more effective use of their understanding of design principles. In textiles, younger students practise basic techniques, such as joining fabrics, and by the end of Key Stage 3 successfully design ties. By the end of Key Stage 4 students research, design and make lined waistcoats in a variety of styles, and evaluate the suitability of the garments for different purposes. Work in resistant materials improves, especially at Key Stage 4, through increased accuracy in handling tools and better presentation of work; students' measurement and drawing skills have improved. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, overall. Work in design and technology makes a significant contribution to the development of students' information and communication technology skills. An extra-curricular activity of international importance – the development of solar powered cars – has assisted the progress of individual students very well. The cars have won many prizes for energy efficiency and the department hopes to compete later this year with its latest car in Australia.

12. The attitude and response of students are good in design and technology. The response of students in lessons is good or better in all lessons at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory or better in all lessons in Key Stage 4. Their good response is characterised by keen interest in the work, a high degree of concentration, good relationships between students themselves and between students and teachers, good behaviour and readiness to take initiative. All students develop their ability to research a topic, provide a number of design ideas, select the best design, plan manufacture, make their design and evaluate the product according to their individual ability as they progress through Key Stages 3 and 4.

13. The quality of teaching in design and technology subjects is good overall, and generally stronger at Key Stage 4 than Key Stage 3. Strengths are teachers' effective use of their subject knowledge and skills. They are keen to transfer their own practical skills to students and have very high expectations of the quality of finish of products students make. Explanations in resistant materials lessons are clear and specific. Teachers give detailed and helpful advice to students on improving their coursework. Efficient use is made of lesson time in food technology, for example, where within the space of an hour a food dish is prepared, evaluated and utensils are cleared away. Teachers are caring of individuals.

Relationships are good and classes are usually well managed. Emphasis on health and safety is good. Lessons are well planned and teachers have prepared useful topic books to support students' learning. Resources are used well. Teachers in textiles cope within cramped accommodation; more generally accommodation is spacious. Throughout technology aspects the teaching of practical skills is often separate from the design process, which generally is emphasised later. The closer integration of these two aspects of design and technology is an area for development.

14. Teamwork among design and technology teachers is generally good. Through a difficult period of extended sickness and absence, the subject has been managed by teachers undertaking leadership responsibilities in a temporary capacity. They have done well to maintain and generally improve standards of work. An overall head of design and technology has recently been appointed.

15. Since the last inspection the attainment of students has improved overall, particularly in the food and textiles areas in Key Stage 4. The quality of written work and presentation is now satisfactory in examination coursework. Students now develop initial design ideas and make products based upon them, although there is relatively little emphasis on the design process in Key Stage 3.

Geography

16. GCSE results in geography are consistently below the national average, although they showed some improvement in 1999. Girls usually attain more highly than boys. Students perform less well in geography than in many other subjects. Results in the A level examination are well below average. In lessons and work seen, attainment is below national expectations at the end of Key Stage 3 and, although better, is still somewhat below average at the end of Key Stage 4.

17. By the end of Key Stage 3, students use a range of sources effectively, including computers, to find information about places and topics. Higher attaining students show awareness of competing pressures on the environment as they argue the case for conservation versus economic development in areas of tropical rain forest. Lower attaining students' understanding of ideas is less secure but they match captions to pictures to sequence some effects of forest clearance. The work of weaker students frequently lacks detail and is incomplete. Although there are opportunities for students to carry out independent research, enquiry skills are not consistently developed at Key Stage 3. Their research lacks focus and organisation. Much written work consists of short responses and copied notes, but there are sound examples of extended writing; for example, students can describe the effects of the Kobe earthquake. Lower attaining students have difficulty in expressing their ideas accurately in writing. By the end of Key Stage 4, students use a range of practical skills to investigate coastal processes in well-planned local fieldwork. Higher attaining students develop sound understanding of the causes and effects of migration from the countryside to explain the growth of cities in developing countries. Average attaining students grasp the main facts but have difficulty in evaluating the impact of solutions to the problems of urban growth. In the sixth form, A level students gain appropriate knowledge for example, of the causes and effects of pollution. However, in written work students seldom define geographical terms and there are few well-argued and detailed accounts with precise exemplification of ideas, so that attainment is below expectations for A level, in lessons.

18. Students join the school with below-average geographical and basic skills. Although they

make satisfactory progress across Key Stage 3, it is not sufficient for them to catch up, so that attainment remains below expectations at the end of the key stage. Students with special educational needs generally make good progress with the effective help of learning support assistants. Without the presence of learning support assistants, students' progress depends on the effectiveness of teachers' planning. Lower attaining students in Year 8 make good progress when effective teaching ensures that the work is well matched to their needs and appropriate attention is given to improving basic literacy skills by the use of key words. On the other hand, students in a bottom set in Year 9 made poor progress as the work was not well matched to their needs. Incidents of poor behaviour by students also contribute to unsatisfactory progress. At Key Stage 4, overall progress is less satisfactory than in Key Stage 3. Whilst some students make good progress when the work is challenging, progress is unsatisfactory in around a third of the lessons. Too much time on low-level tasks, such as copying from worksheets, and lessons that do not build upon previous work contribute to unsatisfactory progress. Progress is good when students develop skills alongside their knowledge and understanding. For example, a Year 10 class made effective use of information and communication technology skills to present their research into the growth of shanties in Sao Paulo; students applied their learning to explore the impact of migration on the city and the rural areas. Sixth form students make satisfactory progress in lessons but progress over time is less secure as some lack appropriate study skills.

19. Students respond well to good teaching. They participate well in oral work and make efforts to complete work; most behave well and co-operate with their teachers. They respond well to opportunities to work independently and in groups. When tasks are varied and offer appropriate challenge, students sustain good levels of concentration. On the other hand, some students are restless if required to listen to the teacher and they interrupt the flow of lessons so that time is wasted in establishing order. The work of a few is scappily presented and frequently incomplete. Students' poor behaviour in a low attaining class in Year 9 seriously affected their progress, which is unsatisfactory. Sporadic attendance of a few students in Year 11 adversely affects their progress. Sixth form students generally show interest in their work, and participate adequately in lessons, although there is little evidence of wide background reading and independent note-making to support the work covered in class.

20. Teaching is mostly satisfactory in Key Stage 3, with some good features. At Key Stage 4, while there is more good and occasionally some very good teaching, in a significant minority of lessons teaching is unsatisfactory so that, overall, it is too varied in quality. Teachers' knowledge and experience are effectively used to plan appropriate fieldwork for examination coursework. The content of lessons is consistently adequately planned, but some lessons would be improved by a clearer focus on what students will know, understand and do by the end of the lesson. In the best lessons, teachers have high expectations, tasks and resources are well matched to the needs of the group, and activities are varied to hold students' attention and maintain a brisk pace. Teachers generally have good classroom control and relationships with students are mostly good. A range of resources is effectively used, including information and communication technology. Unsatisfactory teaching occurs when work is not well planned to build on earlier learning. For example, students are sometimes asked to work at their own pace through photocopied worksheets which are too hard, so they copy information they do not understand. The work is not broken down into manageable steps and ideas are not fully explored in discussions. In these cases, students' understanding of the work remains insecure. Inadequate control of some poor behaviour also contributes to ineffective teaching. Homework is regularly set in most lessons but not consistently and some, mainly lower attaining, groups are not set homework each week. Work is regularly marked and written comments encourage students' efforts, but are seldom sufficiently helpful in showing students how to improve their work.

21. The department has been unable to raise attainment since the last inspection. This is largely due to the continuing weaknesses in teaching. There are, however, signs of improvement. The number, ability and better balance of boys and girls choosing to study geography in Year 10 reflect students' positive responses to improvements in the Key Stage 3 programme. Much work has been done to improve the scheme of work at Key Stage 3, which now needs to incorporate enquiry skills and fieldwork. The department's policy for assessing the National Curriculum is sound and assessments are already much improved for those units of work which have been revised. These improvements now need to be extended to examination courses. The department recognises the need to give students clearer targets for improvement, setting out what they need to do to reach the next level of attainment. The monitoring and support of teaching are in place and are generally effective. Much has been achieved through effective teamwork, despite the long-term absence of the head of department through much of last year. The improvements, however, are too recent to be reflected in higher attainment.

History

22. Overall results at GCSE and A level in history are below the national average. In both examinations, while results at the higher grades are below average, across the full range of grades results are broadly average. GCSE results in 1999 were depressed by a misinterpretation of coursework requirements. At the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, attainment in lessons is in line with national expectations. In sixth form lessons attainment is below expectations for A level.

23. Progress is generally satisfactory across all key stages, but performance in examinations is held back by weaknesses in writing among younger students and in evaluation skills among older students. By the end of Key Stage 3, students understand the significance of historical period and can describe the course of the First World War; higher attaining students refer to dates accurately. All students understand that society changes, for example, in a local study of Harwich, and most offer an explanation of the main causes. Students understand how evidence is taken from sources and make simple observations on them; the highest attaining compare information from several sources which they link to their own knowledge to form a more developed answer. In written work, students use historical terms but find accurate expression and extended writing difficult. Teachers are aware that writing skills must improve to match historical skills and are trying to encourage this development, by providing writing frames and using key words, for example. Attainment in lessons at the end of Key Stage 4 is closer to average than it is in examinations. In their coursework, students show understanding of the history of a Harwich cinema (the Electric Palace) and place it in its historical context; most can describe aspects of contemporary life. Higher attaining students explain the reliability of sources and relate site plans in their local study to the function of the cinema. Coursework allows them time to redraft their writing and improve expression and accuracy. In examinations they comment on evidence, and high attaining students compare, assess the usefulness of information, and reconcile two accounts. However, lower attaining students do not have the secure knowledge, or the ability to extract relevant information and link it all together, under the pressure of an examination, so they do not do well. In the sixth form, attainment is below expectations of A level work. Students' knowledge is too tentative. Generally they understand the course of events and the important connections, but have difficulty in providing contextual detail, in ascribing causes and discussing topics in depth. Higher attaining students consider issues more fully and reach a supported conclusion.

24. By the end of Year 9, students have made sound progress in their use of historical skills. They extract evidence and consider its reliability; they offer an opinion, with at least brief support, and use historical terms correctly. However, overall progress is often impeded by students' poorly developed writing skills, particularly their choice of vocabulary and accuracy of expression. Students with special educational needs make good progress, especially when they are supported in lessons. Students at the end of Year 11 have made good progress over the key stage in their coursework, particularly in their local study. The immediacy of the topic appeals and they apply their knowledge effectively, but in examinations recall and use of knowledge are weaknesses. Higher attaining students obtain the highest grades at GCSE. However, some Key Stage 4 students do not work consistently or seriously enough to prepare themselves well and have only limited success in examinations. The grades obtained by students with special educational needs, while low, generally represent good progress for their abilities. By the end of the sixth form, students' essay writing skills, including vocabulary and structure, have improved satisfactorily. Their evaluative skills improve, though they do not always maintain them consistently.

25. In lessons, students' attitudes to learning are satisfactory. Students at Key Stages 3 and 4 accept that they should behave well in class and try to do so. They work hard at specific tasks, though they do not always listen carefully. They make effective use of computers to extend historical knowledge and, in Years 10 and 11, enquiry skills develop through use of the Internet and other reference material. In the sixth form, students work hard and develop a capacity for independent study. Regular seminars provide the opportunity to explain and test ideas orally. Students begin to read independently.

26. The quality of teaching is at least satisfactory; in a significant minority of lessons it is good and occasionally very good at Key Stage 4 and post-16. Teachers have good subject knowledge which is used to interest students and to focus on significant points by questioning. Some teachers have good understanding of information and communication technology and develop lessons designed to embed historical skills in computer-based activities. Thus Year 7 students, in solving problems of classification, make use of information from spreadsheets and print results in graphical format. All teachers use resources well, including overhead projectors, videos and computers, to broaden experiences and reinforce skills. They ensure that students work to the end of lessons. In the best lessons, there is meticulous planning, based on understanding of students' needs, and structured on the 'must, should and could learn' principle. Sometimes, however, this structure, though identified, is only superficially related to needs. Learning support teachers and assistants help those with special educational needs effectively, matching work well to students' abilities. Homework is regularly set and marked. Written comments are encouraging but brief; oral feedback is more extensive.

27. The department benefits from clear educational direction which has concentrated on raising achievement. As a result of examination analysis, more revision, timed questions, and checks on progress have been introduced. National Curriculum levels are recorded and used to track progress in some classes. Since the last inspection, standards at Key Stage 3 have improved, though they have declined in GCSE examinations. Measures have been taken in regard to staffing and better preparation for the examination. Teaching is significantly improved.

Information and communication technology

28. GCSE results in 1999 were below the national average. Relatively few students achieved

the higher grades at GCSE although results across the full range of grades were broadly average. Few students study the subject at A level so results fluctuate markedly, year by year. In 1999 the single entrant at A level obtained the highest grade, but AS level results were below average.

29. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is broadly in line with national expectations. Students benefit from separately taught lessons in the subject and extensive practice using computers in other subjects. By the end of the key stage they can use a range of information and communication technology equipment to present and analyse information. They know how to integrate information from different sources and can amend, interpret and analyse it. In a project on estimating heat loss from the computer room, Year 8 students selected a formula, built it into a spreadsheet, loaded data and obtained a result. By the end of Year 9, students working on the same topic created sets of instructions, refined and presented data in different forms. Attainment in lessons at the end of Key Stage 4 is broadly in line with expectations of students working towards GCSE. For example, Year 11 students independently select computer applications and combine information to good effect. They understand the limitations of information and communication sources and tools, and the results they produce. They can analyse a real problem and find a solution. However, for the majority of students (about three-quarters) who are not studying the subject for GCSE, their opportunities to learn and practise applications are patchy. Some individuals are competent independent users of information and communication technology, others make little use of computers. Arrangements do not yet meet statutory requirements at Key Stage 4. A small number of students take the combined A/AS level course in the sixth form. Their work in lessons is in line with expectations. For example, in a topic to develop an algorithm to solve a problem they correctly identified the key issues in solving the problem, developed a solution as a flow diagram and made effective use of algebra, including binary numbers.

30. All students make satisfactory progress in Key Stage 3 through separately timetabled lessons. They learn to use word processors, spreadsheets, databases, graphics, desktop publishing and the Internet. The work done with word processors and spreadsheets is particularly extensive and much used in other subjects. Arrangements for grouping students on the basis of their attainment generally assist their progress, but higher attaining students sometimes underachieve because work lacks challenge. In Key Stage 4, progress is unsatisfactory overall. Progress in the GCSE course is much too uneven because not all lessons are taught by subject specialists and the pace of lessons is sometimes slow. The progress made by students studying information and communication technology as part of other GCSE courses depends on the subjects and projects chosen. Significant progress is made in a full range of applications by those students who take business education and some design and technology courses. Nearly all students became independent users of applications for communicating information (including word processing and e-mail). In the sixth form, progress on the computer studies course is always satisfactory. Students on business studies and some GNVQ courses generally make satisfactory progress. However, provision for A level students is insufficient and they make little progress. Overall, progress across the sixth form is unsatisfactory.

31. The response and attitude of students are generally satisfactory, and good in the sixth form. Students have a strong interest in information and communication technology and are eager to learn. Many develop skills through the use of computers at home. Relationships are good, both among students and with the teacher. Concentration sometimes lapses, particularly when the pace of lessons is slow and when conditions in the computer rooms are not conducive to learning, through overcrowding and high temperature and humidity.

32. Teaching is satisfactory or better in all lessons in Key Stage 3, but there are some

weaknesses in teaching in Key Stage 4. Teaching on the computer studies course in the sixth form is good. Weaknesses in teaching include poor use of time, insecure discipline and limited knowledge of the subject. The practice of one teacher introducing the topic of a lesson and another taking over to supervise students' practice does not work well in Key Stage 4. In other lessons, too much time is sometimes spent introducing the topic and this limits the scope of practical work. Features of good teaching observed in each key stage include effective use of teachers' knowledge, for example in questioning Year 8 students to check their understanding, clear lesson planning and good management of students. In good lessons, efficient use is made of time and resources, as in a Year 11 lesson on modeling, and most sixth form lessons.

33. The department is co-ordinated effectively by an experienced teacher. Four teachers from other departments take a small number of lessons each week. Staffing arrangements have been adversely affected by long-term absence due to sickness and this has slowed the development of curriculum and assessment arrangements. The department has been fortunate to secure a good replacement for the technician who left suddenly in July. The school's plan to systematically improve students' attainment in using computers at Key Stage 4 has been implemented in about half the subjects. The school is fortunate in its provision of modern computers and software. The ratio of computer terminals to students in the school is well above the national average. The two main computer rooms and many smaller rooms in other departments, the library and the learning support centre are heavily utilised. The two main computer rooms are too small for the size of classes that use them and they are badly air-conditioned. Technical support is insufficient.

34. Since the last inspection the provision of computers has improved dramatically and the attainment of students in Key Stage 3 has improved. Teaching has improved and students now work well independently. At the last inspection, management time was insufficient and this caused lessons to be interrupted; this is no longer the case. The department has coped well with high levels of teacher absence. Plans are well in hand to strengthen arrangements at Key Stage 4 through extending the use of computers to all subjects.

Modern foreign languages

35. All students study either French or German throughout Key Stages 3 and 4. In Years 8 and 9 all students study both languages and have the opportunity to study both in Key Stage 4. They can study French and German in the sixth form.

36. While GCSE results in French and German were below the national average in 1999, the overall trend in results is of sustained and marked improvement. In French in 1999, boys did better than girls and their results were above the national average for boys. Girls' results in both languages were below the national average for girls. Boys' results in German were low. Both boys and girls do better in French or German than in most other school subjects. Across the full range of GCSE grades (A*-G) results were in line with the national average and indicated satisfactory progress across the full range of attainment, including students with special educational needs. Reading was the least developed skill. In 1999, A level results for the small number of students entered were average in French, with some good performance at the highest (A and B) grades. Results in German were well below average.

37. Standards in lessons and in students' written work show that attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with expectations, with encouraging signs of improvement in Years 7 and 8, but some disappointing work in Year 9. At the end of the key stage, students have sufficient vocabulary to understand short passages of spoken and written French or German. Higher

attaining students follow the gist of longer passages within the prescribed topics. Students speak well in following a model but less well from memory, when pronunciation is often poor. Their responses tend to be confined to single words or short sentences. They lack the confidence to extend their contributions in oral classwork and very few attempt to use the foreign language to cope with routine situations, such as asking for help. They benefit from opportunities to write short paragraphs in the foreign language from an early stage in the course, so that standards in writing are better than in other skills. In Year 9, higher attaining students write at good length to convey personal information with acceptable accuracy. Students in lower attaining classes are less successful in increasing the range of their writing but produce simple accurate sentences in routine exercises.

38. By the end of Key Stage 4, standards of attainment in lessons and written work are below expectations overall. Students extend their knowledge of vocabulary and structure as they study new topics and revise previous work in preparation for modules counting towards their GCSE award. The extent to which they succeed in applying this knowledge varies considerably. Their improved knowledge of vocabulary and tenses enables them to listen for detail in longer passages of spoken language and to follow much of what teachers say in the foreign language. Higher attaining students produce accurate written work, and all students manage to convey written information at their own level. For example, lower attaining students wrote a postcard about a holiday from a model. Average and higher attaining students produced coherent accounts of their holiday, using past tenses. However, all students have limited success in extending the range and accuracy of their oral work. Students from a Year 10 higher attaining class working individually with the French *assistante* struggled to understand and respond to requests for basic personal information. In a Year 11 French lesson, boys in particular participated well in answering questions but their pronunciation and accuracy were weak. In both French and German lessons, oral work is too often restricted to answering the teacher's questions in single sentences. Students read very little, either in textbooks or from other sources, and their reading comprehension skills are insufficiently developed.

39. The level of attainment observed in lessons and written work in the sixth form is broadly in line with expectations for A level. Students work hard to improve the range of their vocabulary and to research the topics prescribed for them. They learn and apply more complex language structures. The good impression made by the content of their written work is reduced by the frequency of more basic errors, for instance in verb and adjectival endings, and in confusing *et* and *est*. This is equally true in their oral work, which is tentative because, although they know what they want to say, they do not always have the confidence in their own ability to say it; this is consistent with the paucity of opportunities for extended speaking lower in the school. They read widely at this level and can deduce meaning well, but in listening tasks they find it difficult to follow native speakers talking at natural pace and at length on complex issues.

40. The progress made by students in Key Stages 3 and 4 is satisfactory, and in the sixth form it is good. The level of attainment on entry is below average overall. Throughout Key Stage 3 they broaden their knowledge of vocabulary and structure as they learn from studying a range of topics to enable them to exchange information about themselves, their family, their house, their town and region. In German they begin to learn the reasons for the many words for 'the', for putting words into an unexpected order and for using capital letters for all nouns. In Year 7 all students write brief paragraphs about themselves and their family. In Year 9, higher attaining students increase the range of their written work and its accuracy, they write lengthy letters to imaginary penfriends and even consider factors contributing to a healthy lifestyle. Average and lower attaining students write much less, and what they write is less ambitious and less accurate, but they manage to convey simple messages. Progress

in speaking is less satisfactory for all students. Though they enjoy oral games and repetitions, which feature strongly in lessons, they lack confidence when not following a model and find it difficult to ask questions. They make very limited use of the foreign language in routine classroom situations. Pronunciation in both languages is too often poor. They improve their listening skills in response to teachers' consistent use of the foreign language to conduct lessons, and are usually able to identify key details in cassette recordings of short conversations, though only higher attaining students succeed in extracting information from longer and more complex passages. The widespread use of worksheets means that students read little in textbooks, and they do not benefit from the use of available reading schemes, so that progress in this skill is least well developed. Students with special educational needs also make satisfactory progress within appropriate classes, and their progress is good when they receive extra support. Higher attaining students do the same work as others in their sets and this does not accelerate their progress. Overall, the picture is similar in Key Stage 4, with better progress in writing than in other skills. Higher attaining students write for different purposes, for example a letter to arrange accommodation, or an extended account of an accident on holiday, and there is a perceptible improvement in accuracy. The emphasis on coursework means that much preparation for the speaking component is also done in writing, which again improves writing but fails to provide opportunities for spontaneous or extended conversation. Less attention is given to listening and reading skills so that students do less well in these elements of their examination. Students in lower sets, including those with special educational needs, make satisfactory progress towards the modified examination targets set for them.

41. A well structured bridging programme helps students embarking on A level courses to revise the grammar of the GCSE course and extend it rapidly. They are quickly able to address the challenging topics of the course, such as environmental issues and the songs of Brassens in Year 12, and proceed in Year 13 to consider wider issues such as the problems of the Third World and relationships in the films of Truffaut. Students acquire an impressive amount of factual information on such topics as they develop their reading skills, supported by timetabled use of the Internet. The good content of their written work is somewhat undermined by carelessness in applying basic language rules, but the incidence of this type of error becomes less frequent as they progress through the course. Some students remain diffident in speaking, despite the advantage of small group size, so that it takes them a long time to build or support an argument. All students have difficulty in following the main themes in long and complex spoken passages, but again there is improvement over time, especially with regular help from the two foreign language assistants.

42. Attitudes to learning a modern foreign language are predominantly positive and have improved since the last inspection. In conversation, many students say they like the subject and see value in learning another language. This is confirmed by the level of attention they pay in class and by the way most students sustain concentration in quite long lessons. The proportion of students taking GCSE in French or German is high, although this year none have chosen to study both for GCSE. In lessons there is a little challenging behaviour, which can on occasion detract from the effectiveness of the lesson, but on the whole students do their best and respect the efforts of teachers and classmates, so that relationships are good. In the presentation of their work students are less conscientious, and too much work is incomplete. They enjoy opportunities to participate in lively activities and work sensibly with each other when limited opportunities arise. In the sixth form, and to a lesser extent in open ended written assignments in Key Stage 4, students show an ability to organise their own work and exceed minimum requirements.

43. Overall, teaching is good in modern foreign languages, supported by effective teamwork. In one fifth of lessons it is very good. It is always good in the sixth form. None the less,

there is a little unsatisfactory teaching. Teachers have excellent command of their main language; three are native speakers. They use this expertise effectively, especially in the sixth form. Expectations of students are high, both of behaviour and of their ability to understand, as teachers make consistent use of the foreign language throughout lessons. The work set is challenging for the average level of attainment of the class, though more could be done to provide further work to extend the more able within groups. Teachers prepare conscientiously for lessons. For example, in the best lessons students take part in a number of brisk and varied activities which increase in difficulty and ensure progress. In a Year 8 French lesson students responded to colourful flashcards to revise the words for pets, learned about the different ways to say 'my' and 'your', and were then able to ask and answer questions about pets. In a Year 11 German lesson students corrected errors in a set of sentences, then took part in brisk oral activities dealing with different grammatical features before going on to construct their own sentences incorporating these points. In these, and in other good lessons, there is a sequence of tasks which leads to student production of the foreign language; this has a positive impact on progress. However, planning for individual lessons and over time does not ensure that such opportunities occur with sufficient regularity. In lessons observed there was too much emphasis on listening and speaking and too little on reading. Much oral work consists of questions by teachers and answers by students, so that tasks in which students experiment with language and extend the length of their utterances are infrequent, and this restricts progress in speaking. Planning does not always match the work done in lessons to the range of ability to be found in each set. In the few lessons where teaching is less than satisfactory it is because of a failure either to match the challenge of the work to the ability of the students, or to prevent poor behaviour from arresting progress. Time is well used and very little is wasted. Teachers make effective use of a good variety of learning resources to enhance learning, which students appreciate. For example, students in a non-GCSE group in Year 10 consolidated their knowledge of school subjects, days and time by competing with each other to complete a computer game. Use of textbooks is limited, however, so there is very little opportunity for students to read material in French or German; yet reading is the weakest skill in GCSE. Teachers manage students sensitively. They use praise and encouragement well and have appropriate strategies for dealing with the few instances of challenging behaviour. Relationships are good. Marking is up to date and conforms to the school's marking policy. Most teachers add helpful comments promote progress in future work. Homework is set regularly and supports work done in class.

44.Aspects of provision which have a positive impact on teaching and learning include equal access to two modern foreign languages for all students in Key Stage 3; the improved use of assessment to set targets and promote progress; the current staffing situation which promises some stability; the good use of spacious accommodation, including display, and of learning resources such as the computer suite. The leadership is a further strength. The head of faculty provides clear educational direction for the subject, above all by example, and also through full and thorough documentation. She has created a strong supportive team, committed to the progress and well-being of students. Work is shared and monitored through regular observation of lessons, with structured feedback which informs professional development needs. Progress on development priorities reflects school priorities in raising attainment. Schemes of work are satisfactory and include very good support materials for students in Years 7, 8 and 11. Extension of support materials to other years, and refinement of schemes to address systematic planning for reading, for extended speaking opportunities and for extending more able students are areas for improvement. The head of faculty has managed a period since the last inspection in which there have been substantial staffing problems, but during which students' attitudes and examination results have improved significantly. The overall improvement since the previous inspection provides a sound basis for the school's bid for language college status.

Music

45. GCSE results in music in 1999 were well below average. The numbers of students studying music in the sixth form are small and, while most achieve a pass grade in the A/AS level examination, overall results are below average.

46. Attainment in music lessons at the ends of Key Stages 3 and 4 is below national expectations overall, although a minority of students attain in line with expectations at both key stages. Students entering the school have little knowledge of musical vocabulary. They participate in a range of suitable activities and in Year 7 invent short *ostinato* patterns to accompany a poem. They perform their simple compositions on tuned and untuned percussion instruments, with many students showing a good sense of pulse and an awareness of dynamic shading. Year 9 students improvise over a four beat chord sequence, with a few students successfully combining two parts and showing satisfactory knowledge of the keyboard. Weaknesses in understanding and use of musical vocabulary persist throughout the key stage. Too frequently, students do not achieve the standards of performance of which they are capable, because they do not give their full attention to their work. In Key Stage 4, students use and develop musical ideas for their compositions and satisfactorily record these in music notation. In a Year 10 lesson, students were given the task of continuing a melodic line or developing a rhythmic pattern through improvisation. Many students were able to extend these ideas into a short piece. Students in a Year 11 lesson played orchestral instruments in an ensemble rehearsal of *Don't Cry For Me Argentina*. Many had a secure knowledge of their own parts. Many students embark on the GCSE course with very limited experience of playing musical instruments and this affects standards attained overall. Sixth formers use musical technology confidently to devise and improve their work as, for example, in a lesson where they worked on an arrangement of Pachelbel's *Canon*. Students discussed the processes used and evaluated the end results. Attainment in sixth form lessons is broadly in line with course expectations.

47. Students make satisfactory progress overall in lessons and across Key Stages 3 and 4, although, where there are weaknesses in teaching, students' progress is adversely affected. Younger students make satisfactory progress in understanding how sounds can be combined to create an effect and in performing to an audience. As they move up Key Stage 3 they develop rhythmic skills, understanding of chord patterns and improvisation. Students in Key Stage 4 working towards GCSE develop understanding of how to convey musical ideas in compositions and through ensemble playing. Participation in extra-curricular activities helps students to develop their performance skills. Students with special educational needs usually keep up with the rest of the class. Sixth form students make good progress, assisted by effective use of musical technology, discussion and evaluation in lessons.

48. The majority of students in Key Stage 3 have satisfactory attitudes towards the subject and work co-operatively, when required. A small minority, however, are occasionally badly behaved and this has a negative impact on their standards of attainment and progress. In Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form attitudes are good. Students in Key Stage 4 concentrate on their individual assignments and sixth formers show a positive and committed approach to their work. Many students enjoy participating in extra-curricular activities.

49. Overall, the teaching of music is satisfactory, but there are weaknesses which are more pronounced at Key Stage 3. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and use their own musical skills to help students develop in understanding and performance. In satisfactory and good lessons, careful attention is given to supporting individual students during group

work, and this has a positive impact on progress; for example, good teaching in a Year 7 lesson enabled students to improve their instrumental skills. However, weaknesses in some lessons with younger students include lack of challenge for more musically able students and weak management of students, so that incidents of poor behaviour are not controlled and little learning takes place. Teaching at Key Stage 4 is uniformly satisfactory. For example, in a Year 10 lesson on melody writing students of different levels of attainment were appropriately supported and challenged. The teacher gave students a clear indication of how phrases can be taken and extended and students made satisfactory progress in improvising short tunes for performance. Practical work covers syllabus requirements, although occasionally the pace is slow, and students are not given clear targets to be completed on time. Sixth form teaching is good. The strengths and weaknesses of individual students are known and good use of the teacher's own expertise helps students to progress. Musical technology is used effectively to develop students' skills in sequencing and refining their compositions.

50. Provision for extra-curricular activities, including instrumental lessons, is good and these have a positive impact on developing students' performing skills. A school band and a choir, as well as other instrumental groups, involve over 100 students. The Harwich School Music Theatre Workshop production of *Annie* took place during the inspection and past productions have included *Grease* and *Fame*. The school band regularly plays at the quay in the summer months during the departure of cruise ships. Rock band performances have been held and the Music for Fun evenings and the Community Carol Service are appreciated by parents. The Harwich School Music Circle, which is run by a group of parents, is successful in raising money to support extra-curricular activities.

51. Management of the department is satisfactory, overall. Staff changes since the last inspection have affected the standards achieved by students, although the head of department has remained in post throughout. The scheme of work for Key Stage 3 is satisfactory, but no scheme is organised for Key Stage 4, which makes it difficult to ensure that all syllabus requirements are covered thoroughly. Assessment arrangements are satisfactory. Resources are good. The strength of leadership is in the promotion of enjoyment of music and involvement of the school in local activities. Both A and AS level courses have been introduced. However, since the last inspection report, results have fallen and the overall quality of teaching has declined at Key Stage 3.

Physical education

52. Results for both GCSE and A level examinations in physical education in 1999 were above the national averages. At GCSE, girls' results were well above the national average for girls and boys' results were above the national average for boys. Results obtained in GCSE and A level examinations are good in relation to other subjects. The school has a justifiably good reputation for the performance of its many school teams in a range of individual and competitive sports. Many students have represented either Essex or Suffolk and some have gone on to gain national honours.

53. The attainment of students at the end of Key Stage 3 is above the national expectation. In games activities, students have a good knowledge of rules and conventions of a variety of sports and they are developing appropriate skills to enable them to compete successfully. The overall standard of swimming is very good, with very few non-swimmers in the school. Most students demonstrate competence in a variety of strokes, in life-saving and in personal

survival techniques. In gymnastics, students define their body shapes both in flights and on apparatus, and are beginning to construct simple gymnastic sequences. Most girls arrive in the school with only a very limited experience of dance but quickly respond to the good teaching, so that by the end of Key Stage 3 they are able to choreograph a story line and perform it with poise and fluency. The attainment of students at the end of Key Stage 4 is also better than national expectations. Good levels of skill development are clearly evident in a wide variety of activities. Students understand tactics and strategies well and are able to apply the skills they have practised in the full games. In health-related education students attain satisfactory understanding of fitness issues and practices, and are able to maintain activity levels for appropriate periods of time. Students in the examination groups both for GCSE and A level have above-average understanding and expertise in the theoretical and practical aspects of the subject. Students with special educational needs are well-integrated into groups, are given much support and encouragement by both the teaching staff and other students, and reach good levels of attainment. Teaching is sensitive and supportive and students with special educational needs have good access to the range of physical education activities.

54. Most students, including those with special educational needs, are making good progress at all key stages. Students are progressing well in their knowledge, their performance in a range of skills, their general application of the rules of play and their ability to co-operate effectively with other group members. Students are building up their understanding of fitness principles throughout Key Stages 3 and 4 so that they are able to plan their own fitness programme by the end of Year 11. Their knowledge and use of technical terms and language show good progress through each unit of work. In both GCSE and A level examination groups students are producing coursework files which are generally well presented and detailed. The readiness of sixth formers to link their understanding of physiology to exercise and fitness helps them to progress well.

55. Students of all ages have very positive attitudes towards physical education, both in their lessons and in extra-curricular activities. Behaviour and discipline are good. Students work productively together in pairs and group work. The quality of relationships among students and between them and their teachers is good. Students participate and respond well to the tasks set and to the general activities of the lesson. Their enjoyment of their work is clearly evident. Sixth formers concentrate hard and readily share their experience with others to help them improve.

56. The quality of teaching is always at least satisfactory and it is often good or very good, with some excellent teaching of hockey. The teachers in the department have a good command of their subject. They use their knowledge effectively to explain techniques to students, for example, in introducing the butterfly stroke in a swimming lesson for Year 8 students. Lessons are well planned with appropriate content and the relevant resources are well organised. For example, at A level good emphasis is placed on theoretical understanding, linked to students' own experience, as in a lesson on the planning of a fitness programme, which included a series of fitness tests. Practical work is purposeful and vigorous with useful evaluation involving students, so that they know what to do to improve, as in a basketball lesson with Year 11 students. Teachers are enthusiastic and expectations are high. Questions are thoughtful and challenge students well. The quality of teaching has a positive impact on the attainment of the students and on their enjoyment of the subject.

57. The physical education curriculum is balanced for both boys and girls, and meets statutory requirements, but dance is provided only for girls. Key Stage 4 students can choose to study GCSE in the subject and sixth form students are able to take an A level in

the subject. These options have been taken up by able and enthusiastic groups of pupils. All students in the sixth form have the opportunity to take part in physical education activities on a voluntary basis and about 20 per cent participate, but these activities were not observed during the inspection. New procedures for assessing and recording students' achievements have been introduced since the last inspection. They are now very comprehensive, in line with school policy, and cover statutory requirements. They include a good student self-assessment component. Many teachers give very freely of their time to provide a very wide range of extra-curricular clubs, which are taken up by large and enthusiastic groups of students. Students also have the opportunity to visit national sporting events, to take part in hockey tours to Holland, join skiing parties to Italy and enjoy water sports in Spain. A group of Year 11 students has taken part in rock climbing on the climbing wall at Colchester and have been involved in water sport activities at Brightlingsea. The well-maintained playing fields, sports hall, fitness room, good sized gymnasium and playground areas are supplemented by the occasional use of the Dovercourt swimming pool. These facilities combine to have a very positive effect on the attainment of the students.

58.Strong leadership characterises this well led and managed department. Documentation on all aspects of the policies is extensive and very well presented. The staff who teach physical education work well together, support each other and show a very strong commitment to the students. High standards have been maintained since the last inspection and work at A level is now well established.

Religious education

59.Religious education conforms to the Dorset Agreed Syllabus at Key Stage 3 and an appropriate GCSE course is offered at Key Stage 4. Attainment on entry is generally well below national expectations. By the end of Key Stage 3, attainment is just below national expectations, which represents good progress across the key stage. In 1999, GCSE results for the first group of nine students were well below the national average although for several individuals the results represented a good achievement. In lessons, achievement is generally in line with expectations and progress is consistently good.

60.By the end of Key Stage 3 students can talk about a range of religions and show an understanding of different religious practices. They can appreciate similarities and differences between them: an exercise for Year 7 students in pairing quotations about Jesus from the Qu'ran and the New Testament stimulated a lot of interest. Year 9 students can talk about festivals and the way that beliefs influence lifestyle and moral attitudes. Students remember unusual factual vocabulary but have more difficulty with abstract concepts; for example, in a lesson on the founders of religions, Year 8 students remembered that Guru Nanak founded Sikhism, but their knowledge of his teachings was very basic. By the end of Year 11, students have a basic knowledge of Islam and Christianity and have satisfactory understanding of a range of contemporary moral issues. Attainment at sixth form level is low because virtually no opportunities are provided for students to consider relevant issues.

61.Progress is good in oral work in lessons across Key Stages 3 and 4. The use of key words and repetition helps, in all years. In many cases, weak literacy skills hold back students, particularly at Key Stage 3. Spelling and sentence structure are often poor and students have difficulty putting into words shades of meaning. Well-planned project work enables students to consolidate their progress, with more thoughtful and polished presentation of facts. Progress in Key Stage 4 lessons is more secure. In a lesson with Year 11 students learning about aspects of Islam, the teacher's well focused questions enabled students to make good gains in knowledge. Students' effective use of research

helps them add depth to their knowledge.

62. Students' attitudes to their work and their behaviour in class are good. They support each other and work well in pairs and groups. They are beginning to take charge of their own learning, and opportunities to do their own research are well used. They make effective use of a range of resources including computers, although they have few opportunities to access the Internet. They clearly enjoy their work. Good research work was seen in a Year 9 project where students were investigating Nobel prize winners. The task of writing a book for much younger children on their chosen character challenged them into really understanding written text gleaned from elsewhere, and expressing clearly and simply the key points for the reader. Magazines, books and the Internet were being used and good word processing skills developed.

63. Teaching is good. It has pace and a good range of practical activities ensures students' interest. Opportunities are given for students to take charge of their own learning. Effective management of groups ensures the full integration and participation of all students and encourages good behaviour. Activities and opportunities are well matched to the varied abilities of students. Sound revision at the start of lessons assists students in recalling recent work. A joint project with the music department has reinforced the relevance of religious education whilst building confidence and giving a good deal of pleasure. Relevant community resources are few but good use is made of local clergy. Visits to the Central Mosque, Regents Park and to St Paul's Cathedral are planned. Good use is made of the collection of religious artefacts owned by the department. Relatively little use is made of information and communication technology and little practice is provided in writing structured essays, which is an area needing improvement.

64. Religious education makes a good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students. A lesson which started with a 'stilling' exercise emphasised the importance of reflection, and a revision exercise on Sikhism emphasised very strongly the equality of all peoples. Improvements are being introduced into the curriculum and teaching approaches. The scheme of work is undergoing change with the adoption of the Essex Agreed Syllabus. The last inspection highlighted as a key issue non-compliance with the statutory requirement to provide for the religious education of all students at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. No progress has been made towards implementing this requirement, largely because of unexpected staff changes. The subject is effectively managed, with commitment to developing its role within the school curriculum.

Vocational courses

196.

65. In the sixth form, the school provides courses in business leading to GNVQ at both advanced and intermediate levels. Courses in health and social care and in science are offered at intermediate level only. Additionally, a certificate in administration is provided. No vocational qualifications are offered at Key Stage 4, although several GCSE courses in business subjects are offered: business and economics, business studies, office applications, and a separately accredited course in word processing.

66. Students' overall results at the end of Key Stage 4 in business subjects are above average; they do particularly well in business and economics. Results at the end of the sixth form courses are above average for business at advanced level, and generally below average for courses at intermediate level, although each year a number of students gain unit accreditation, rather than a full award, and successfully re-enter. Achievement of students on the certificate of administration course is good.

67. In lessons at the end of Key Stage 4, students have a good grasp of basic business concepts, for example of how organisations price their goods and what governs price in various markets. Students studying business and economics can explain the link between investment and taxation. Overall, attainment is above course expectations. Students on the advanced level business course make effective use of advanced business concepts, for example, they understand the link between boom, inflation and recession, and can apply the concept to new situations, for example the economy in China. Their computer skills are good. Overall, attainment at the end of the advanced business course is above average in lessons. On the intermediate level courses students are working in line with course expectations; for example, in science they make effective use of the Internet to find information. Inaccuracies in spelling and grammar detract from the quality of coursework of individual students.

68. Students make good progress in lessons and across both key stages. In lessons at Key Stage 4 they learn to apply basic concepts, for example about supply and demand, to particular businesses. Their coursework shows good progress. Sixth form students make good progress towards assessment criteria in their coursework on all vocational courses. They learn to use information and communication technology effectively in researching topics (for example, finding out about crude oil in science), as well as presenting and analysing their work (for example, by using spreadsheets, databases and word-processing). On the advanced business course students learn to analyse trends, handle mathematical information and apply their understanding in practical situations. Students with special educational needs generally keep up with the rest on the intermediate courses.

69. Students respond well on vocational courses at both key stages. They are always well behaved and attentive. Younger students are enthusiastic, though inclined to chatter until they are involved in their work. They like the real-life examples teachers provide and participate well. For example, Year 10 students working on a recruitment topic were enthusiastic about joining in mock interviews. Sixth formers behave responsibly when working without direct supervision. Their work is generally well presented and organised. They respond very well in practical work placements, gaining self-confidence and a range of work-related skills; their overall progress benefits from their appreciation of how their coursework is linked to real-life situations. In the last school year a significant minority of students on intermediate level courses did not complete their courses, which reduced overall success. This had not been the pattern in earlier years. Sixth formers, those on the advanced business course especially, concentrate well in lessons. Teamwork is good in all sixth form groups.

70. Vocational courses and subjects are well taught. Teachers are knowledgeable about business topics and draw effectively on their own industrial and commercial experience to provide interesting activities. Relationships are good and students are managed well. Teachers treat sixth formers as adults, which students appreciate. Expectations are high, on the whole, but occasionally questions lack challenge and focus, and do not move students on in their learning. Assignments on vocational courses are well structured. Teachers' planning is good, with effective coverage of assessment criteria which are judged at the right level. Student materials for sixth form courses are well produced to support learning, with appropriate emphasis on key skills. Liaison with work experience placements is very good, on the whole. Students' commitment to the content of the vocational courses, and work experience particularly, supports their personal and social development very well.

71. Vocational courses, including business subjects, are well led and organised. Staff work

together well and subjects teams meet frequently. Course leaders of courses leading to vocational qualifications meet relatively infrequently (only at termly intervals); this limits opportunities for monitoring progress and planning developments. The courses are generally well resourced. Sixth form students, especially, have access to good computer facilities and this helps their coursework and overall progress.

72. The vocational courses provide good added value in terms of students' results and progression opportunities. Over the last few years, 28 students have progressed to university from the advanced business course. At the time of the last inspection a greater range of courses leading to vocational qualifications had just been introduced. The range has since been extended a little to include science at intermediate level. Other opportunities at GCSE have remained about the same, but no vocational qualifications have been introduced at Key Stage 4. Given the generally good response of students to vocational courses, this area is one for development within the curricular offer of the school.

204.

PART C: INSPECTION DATA

204. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

73. The team consisted of 13 inspectors who spent a total of 53 days gathering first-hand evidence in the school. In all, 205 hours were spent visiting classes, in discussion with students and looking at their work, and visiting assemblies and form times. All full-time members of staff were seen teaching at least once and many several times. Lesson visits were arranged to sample the work of each subject across year groups and the range of ability of students in the school.

74. A wide variety of evidence was considered. Planned discussions were held with staff responsible for subject areas and different aspects of the work of the school. There was a formal discussion with the chair and vice-chair of governors, in addition to a pre-inspection discussion which most governors attended. Several members of the inspection team met informally a variety of local people, including representatives of local businesses and headteachers of local primary schools. Examples of students' work were looked at in lessons and representative samples of students' work in each year group for each curriculum subject were scrutinised by inspectors. Planned discussions were held with students in each year group, and informal discussions with many more. Documentation provided by the school was analysed both before and during the inspection. The Registered Inspector held a meeting attended by 27 parents. The team considered 177 replies from parents to a questionnaire about the school.

DATA AND INDICATORS

Pupil data

	Number of pupils on roll (full-time equivalent)	Number of pupils with statements of SEN	Number of pupils on school's register of SEN	Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals
Y7 - Y13	1116	21	202	191

206. Teachers and classes

206. Qualified teachers (Y7 - Y13)

Total number of qualified teachers (full-time equivalent):

67

Number of pupils per qualified teacher:

16.7

206. Education support staff (Y7- Y13)

Total number of education support staff:

22

Total aggregate hours worked each week:

618

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes:

78.2

Average teaching group size:

25

KS3

KS4

21

206. **Financial data**

Financial year:	1998-99
	£
Total Income	3,278,369
Total Expenditure	3,358,391
Expenditure per pupil	2,875
Balance brought forward from previous year	131,304
Balance carried forward to next year	51,282

206. PARENTAL SURVEY

Number of questionnaires sent out:	1116
Number of questionnaires returned:	177

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	14	73	8	4	1
I would find it easy to approach the school with questions or problems to do with my child(ren)	27	65	3	4	1
The school handles complaints from parents well	13	51	27	6	3
The school gives me a clear understanding of what is taught	14	66	13	7	0
The school keeps me well informed about my child(ren)'s progress	29	58	11	2	0
The school enables my child(ren) to achieve a good standard of work	17	67	10	5	1
The school encourages children to get involved in more than just their daily lessons	18	65	13	4	0
I am satisfied with the work that my child(ren) is/are expected to do at home	12	67	5	14	2
The school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on my child(ren)	13	59	17	11	0
The school achieves high standards of good behaviour	9	54	22	13	2
My child(ren) like(s) school	25	61	9	3	2

206. Other issues raised by parents

Overall, parents at their meeting and in response to a questionnaire were supportive of the school. Parents find the school approachable, feel well informed about their children's progress and believe their children like coming to the school. They feel that the school is managed well and they like the values the school promotes. At their meeting they stated firmly that students' behaviour and interest in learning have improved since the last inspection. Parents also stated that opportunities to learn after school hours in the learning zone had had a positive effect on attitudes to learning. At the time of the meeting the learning zone had been suspended because of funding difficulties, but information has recently been received that this will be reinstated. Many students had used the learning zone to do their homework. Parents had mixed views about homework. Some felt that younger children were asked to do too much, and others that older students did insufficient.

Inspectors found homework was regularly set and many students, younger ones especially, worked hard in the library. But not all students have good work habits; a small minority treat homework casually. Parents had mixed views about behaviour. A few parents at their meeting were concerned that staff changes have affected the continuity of students' learning in several subjects.