

INSPECTION REPORT

St Simon Stock Catholic School

Maidstone, Kent

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 118904

Headteacher: Mr E. Mulhearn

Reporting inspector: Valerie Jenkins
2037

Dates of inspection: 20/03/00 – 24/03/00

Inspection number: 186087

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Oakwood Park Maidstone Kent
Postcode:	ME16 OJP
Telephone number:	01622 754551
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Joyce Gibson
Date of previous inspection:	16/10/1995 – 20/10/1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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Valerie Jenkins	Registered inspector		What sort of school? How high are standards? How well are pupils taught? How good are curricular and other opportunities? How well is the school led and managed?
John Brasier	Lay inspector		How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Marguerite Presman	Team inspector	Mathematics	
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Joe Edge	Team inspector	Science	
Haydn Webb	Team inspector	Design technology Information and communications technology	
Michael Clarke	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
Gilbert McGinn	Team inspector	History	The sixth form
George Rayner	Team inspector	Geography	
David Rogers	Team inspector	Art	
Barbara Johnstone	Team inspector	Music	
Robert Castle	Team inspector	Physical education	
Christine Phillips	Team inspector		Special educational needs and equal opportunities
David Bain	Team inspector		Support on standards, the curriculum

The inspection contractor was

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The Registrar
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St. Simon Stock is an average sized mixed 11-18 voluntary-aided Roman Catholic comprehensive school on the outskirts of Maidstone, with 1018 pupils on roll, including 200 in the sixth form. The school serves the Roman Catholic community of mid-Kent. It also offers places to other Christians who make up one third of the roll. The school opened as a secondary modern in 1967, became fully comprehensive in 1979 and was grant maintained between 1993 and 1999. The school is popular and over-subscribed. Almost all pupils are of white UK heritage and less than 1 per cent use English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils eligible for free meals, 3.9 per cent, is low. One quarter of the pupils is on the special educational needs register, above the national figures, although less than average have full statements. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is average although there are fewer very able pupils because of Kent's selective system but also fewer of modest attainment.

The Head was absent during the inspection because of illness.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St. Simon Stock is a sound and caring school in which staff and pupils enjoy working. It places great emphasis on examination success and parents and pupils are appreciative of the support given to achieve this. Good teaching ensures high standards of work, particularly in the sixth form. The pastoral management of the school is extremely effective. The school provides sound value for money and its sixth form is cost effective.

What the school does well

- Attainment is above the national average with consistently high standards in art and English throughout the school.
- Boys attain well, better than boys elsewhere in the country do.
- Teaching is good overall and especially effective in the sixth form.
- Most pupils have positive attitudes to learning and these are very good in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.
- It has a strong sense of community.
- Pupils receive very good support through the pastoral system.
- It cares very effectively for the welfare of the individual child.
- Staff, students and parents share a commitment to the school.

What could be improved

- The grouping of pupils in Key Stage 3 and its effect on attainment, especially of pupils with special educational needs.
- Raising attainment at Key Stage 4 to match that in similar schools in the country.
- The quality of teaching in years 7 and 8, especially in the bottom band and in mathematics, science and general literacy.
- The monitoring and evaluation of teaching and the quality of pupils' work.
- The poor quality of marking and assessment particularly in Key Stage 3.
- Strategic planning and whole school management.
- The curriculum, including its overall management, its breadth and balance, the time given to individual subjects and post 16 provision.
- Ensuring that statutory requirements are met at Key Stage 4 for the teaching and assessment of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and that all pupils study design technology.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Standards have improved. Attainment is higher although there have been wide fluctuations from year to year in results overall and in individual subjects. Teaching has also improved. The Head and Governing Body have not pursued the key issues in the last inspection sufficiently vigorously and inadequate progress has been made in improving aspects of the curriculum, the learning of some bottom band pupils in Key Stage 3, standards in Information and Communications Technology, development planning and the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and pupils' work.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14, 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in Key Stage 3 tests, GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools*	
	1997	1998	1999	1999	
GCSE examinations	A	B	A	D	well above average A average B above average C average D below average E well below average
A-levels/AS-levels	C	A	A		

* Similar schools are non-selective schools throughout England with fewer than 5% of their pupils eligible for free school meals.

External results

Pupils have gained results well above national averages at Key Stage 3 for the last four years. The improvement trend is above that in England. Boys' attainment is higher than girls. Results have fluctuated significantly between years, however, with a sharp rise between 1996 and 1997 but the improvement has been sustained only in mathematics. Pupils' overall attainment matches that in similar schools although in English it is well above, in line in mathematics but well below them in science.

At GCSE, in the last three years, pupils have also attained results well above national averages in both the 5+A*-C and 5+A*-G categories. Boys, again, have gained better results overall than the girls. Results have fluctuated from year to year with the improvement trend below that nationally. Results in comparison with similar schools in 1999 were below average.

Advanced Level results have improved steadily in the last three years and in 1999 were well above national averages. GNVQ candidates gain very good results.

The school's targets for overall pass rates are realistic but the use of points scores is more recent. Detailed scrutiny of results, other than by gender, occurs but the outcomes are not used to plan strategies to eliminate differences. Pupils achieve consistently high standards in examinations in art, English and combined science (double award) but in other subjects results vary too much from year to year.

In lessons seen and work studied.

Standards at Key Stage 3 are more variable than at Key Stage 4. Careful preparation for the National Curriculum tests ensures pupils achieve above average results but scrutiny of their earlier work across all subjects shows standards to be below average. Work by most pupils is not well organised or presented and has too many technical errors.

Standards improve in Key Stage 4 with the demands of the external syllabuses well understood. Examination preparation is extremely thorough.

Standards are high in the sixth form with GNVQ courses especially successful. In some Advanced Level lessons there is too little independent learning.

There is no co-ordinated approach to developing pupils' reading and writing skills and this affects overall standards especially in Key Stage 3. They do not read widely and relatively few read for pleasure. Pupils are generally good listeners and contribute readily to class discussion. They enjoy reading aloud and many do so expressively but they have few opportunities to engage in extended and formal talk, role-play or to acquire the skills of voice projection and movement. Although numeracy is well taught in mathematics it is not sufficiently developed across the curriculum.

Pupils achieve sound standards overall by the end of all key stages but with higher and more explicit expectations especially at Key Stage 3, improved monitoring and more active and independent learning styles, they could achieve still more.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils are happy in the school and appreciate its emphasis on hard work, its friendly atmosphere and that they are valued as individuals.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good, very good in the sixth form. Pupils act responsibly at lunchtime and when unsupervised. They sometimes lapse into casual chatter when not closely supervised or taught by less skilled teachers. Younger pupils in the lower band find concentration hard.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Boys and girls work well together and usually enjoy excellent relationships with their peers and teachers. Pupils reported little or no bullying. Lower bands' suffer from limited exposure to their more able and confident peers.
Attendance	Very good. Punctuality is satisfactory.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	satisfactory	good	very good

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

Teaching was at least satisfactory in 94% of lessons seen, with 42% good and 23% very good. The proportions of good and very good teaching exceed the national averages. There are examples of good or very good teaching in all subjects with the highest proportions in art, geography, German, music, physical education and technology.

The teaching in English, mathematics and science is sound overall with all having some very good and also some unsatisfactory practice, the latter mostly to the lower band

classes in Key Stage 3. High attaining pupils are often challenged and inspired by the best teaching but work for the lower attainers is insufficiently targeted to their needs. Marking lacks the necessary rigour to assure standards, particularly in Years 7-9.

The strengths of teaching across the curriculum are the teachers' strong subject knowledge, effective use of resources and well-planned homework. Pupils enjoy the active approaches used in art, music and physical education. Weaker aspects are insufficiently high expectations of pupils in the lower band and generally poor marking and assessment at Key Stage 3. The teaching of the basic skills of literacy and numeracy is neglected across the curriculum. Most lessons are well planned but often lack the intellectual and creative challenge seen, for example, in GNVQ art. Pupils are rarely required to carry out individual research and the library is not the learning hub of the school.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Unsatisfactory. Not all pupils study statutory technology in Key Stage 4 and Information and Communications Technology remains of concern. Limited time for some subjects in Key Stage 3 affects teaching styles and attainment. The sixth form offers a good range of Advanced Level courses but does not cater well for those of more modest attainment. Careers education is sound.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Unsatisfactory, especially at Key Stage 3 where grouping most of such pupils together is affecting their learning. Learning Support Assistants offer good support in class. The provision of voluntary lunchtime sessions for basic skills are not an acceptable alternative to timetabled lessons. Pupils' targets are not subject-specific and annual reports do not detail progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Pupils are few in number but well integrated and make satisfactory progress.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Pupils' spiritual development is sound, well supported in assemblies and form time but opportunities within the curriculum are more limited. Provision for moral and social development is good. Pupils give generously to charity. Cultural provision, including the study of multi-cultural issues has improved since the last inspection and is now satisfactory. The personal and social education programme is effective in Years 7-11.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pupils' welfare and happiness are paramount concerns as parents and pupils acknowledge. Support by teachers and chaplains is very good. The assessment and oversight of their attainment and academic progress are unsatisfactory. Annual reports to parents are poor.

Opportunities to study the creative and performing arts are limited. There are no vocational courses at Key Stage 4 and the GNVQ offer in the sixth form is narrow. The practice of moving pupils up but never down bands leads to some unacceptably large groups in the upper band in Key Stage 3. Some lower sets contain pupils with attitude rather than learning difficulties.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Pastoral management is a strength. High attainment is emphasised but oversight of the curriculum is weak. The school runs well on a day to day basis. The administrative staff are welcoming and efficient.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are knowledgeable and well informed and operate with effective committees. They have not ensured appropriate action on the key issues in the last inspection nor have they considered fully the implications of some of their curricular decisions.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Monitoring and evaluation of performance is inconsistent both at a whole school and departmental level. As a result, development planning lacks focus and is not an effective instrument of school improvement.
The strategic use of resources	Financial controls are very good and the school makes sound use of staff, accommodation and resources. Educational priorities are not sufficiently linked to finance. The library is under-funded with too few books and resources. The school gives satisfactory value for money.

Staff and governors report on the Head's very strong leadership. They appreciate his commitment to the school and respect his 'top down' management style. However, well-documented procedures are not consistently followed and not all staff feel involved in the selection of key priorities.

Recent budgetary constraints have limited professional development. Accommodation is poor and is in need of refurbishment. Resources are adequate in most subjects. The principles of best value are well understood at deputy head level.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<p>The ethos of hard work</p> <p>The approachability of the staff.</p> <p>The quality of the leadership and management.</p> <p>Their children are encouraged to become mature and responsible.</p> <p>Their children make good progress</p>	<p>Extra-curricular activities</p> <p>Homework</p> <p>Information about progress</p> <p>Behaviour</p> <p>Their closer involvement in the school.</p>

The inspection team endorses all the strengths apart from the curriculum aspect of leadership but not all of the concerns. Homework was not found to be problematic. Extra-curricular activities are limited in range but well attended. Behaviour was generally good. Parents are little involved in the day to day life of the school but attend events well related to their children.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

- 1 Since the last inspection, attainment in the school has improved overall although there have been wide differences between years and in the pupils' performance in individual subjects.

Key Stage 3

- 2 At Key Stage 3, pupils have gained results well above national averages for the last four years. There was a rapid rise between 1996-7 and the sudden improvement has been maintained, except in the 1999 science results. The trend in the school's average points score is above that in the country as a whole. Boys' attainment is higher than girls except in English. Pupils' results overall are comparable to those in similar schools with a non-selective intake although there are significant differences between subjects. Attainment is well above that of similar schools in English, in line in mathematics but well below in science.

GCSE

- 3 At GCSE pupils have also attained results well above national averages in both the 5+A* C and 5+A*-G categories in the last three years despite a dip in 1998, attributed to the loss of pupils to selective education. Boys, again, have gained better results overall than the girls. Results have fluctuated from year to year and the overall trend in improvement is lower than that found nationally. Results in comparison with similar schools in 1999 were also below average. The school has analysed its results for 1999 and found that in terms of value added performance from Key Stage 3 to 4, that results are better than could have been expected. However, the school acknowledges some concerns about attainment at GCSE and the Head selected it as an aspect to be studied by the inspection team. The pupils are carefully prepared for examinations and do well as a consequence. There is not always enough emphasis on independent learning to guarantee understanding.
- 4 The school's targets for overall pass rates are realistic but the use of points scores is more recent. The targets are different in various documents and strategies to assure their achievement are not sufficiently well planned, nor is there a detailed examination of the reasons for the variation between subjects from year to year. For example, many subjects had lower points scores in 1998 but certain key subjects such as English, French, German, economics, art, music and child development did not.
- 5 Pupils achieve consistently high standards in examinations in art, English, and combined science but in other subjects results vary too much from year to year. There is a high proportion of high grades in art, chemistry, English language, mathematics and physics and fewer than could be expected in business studies, economics, French, German and home economics.
- 6 There is a detailed analysis based on value added data but this does not currently include gender. This valuable information is not used consistently to plan strategies to redress any identified deficiencies, particularly in the recent fall in girls' attainment.
- 7 The recent GCSE results show unusual features with boys' results in English much closer to the girls' than the national pattern. In mathematics and combined science also the boys do better than the girls and most surprisingly in French where the 1999 boys' results are well ahead of boys nationally and the girls in the school. Only in art

do the girls gain significantly better results than the boys, although they attained higher standards than girls elsewhere in both English and combined science in 1999. The girls are most successful in relation to their other subjects in art, combined science, English, home economics and mathematics. In contrast boys did better in 1999 than boys elsewhere in English, combined science, mathematics, technology, geography and French. In comparison with their other entries, boys attain at higher levels in combined science, design technology and English.

- 8 Boys' attainment is higher than girls and the improvement was especially marked in 1999. The performance of girls has dropped since the last inspection when they were attaining at significantly higher levels than the boys. A working party made sound recommendations about teaching techniques to which boys respond and this has clearly been effective.

Post 16

- 9 Results of students entered for two or more Advanced Levels have improved steadily over the last three years. They have moved from below national performance levels in 1996 and 1997 to ones, which in 1999 were well above. A high proportion of pupils gain A/B grades in 1999 with strong results in English, history and religious studies and in the small numbers entered in languages and politics. Those entered for GNVQ courses in both art and business studies achieve results significantly above the national pattern.
- 10 Pupils achieve satisfactory standards overall by the end of each key stage but with higher expectations, improved monitoring and more independent learning styles could achieve still more.

Attainment in lessons and the work surveys

In 1995

- 11 The last inspection noted that appropriate standards were reached in 80% of lessons although there was underachievement in some lower and middle ability classes in Key Stage 3 and in some English, languages and science lessons and that IT was used too little across the curriculum. It was recommended that pupils be encouraged to work more independently; accept more responsibility for aspects of their learning and discuss their findings and ideas more. Technical accuracy was described as poor for a significant minority, including the more able.

In 2000

- 12 Attainment overall has improved, but most of the same concerns remain. At Key Stage 3, standards rise in Year 9 and pupils' attainment improves in each successive key stage. As the demands of external syllabuses impact on Key Stage 4 pupils, their commitment and that of their teachers to examination success ensure that work is taken very seriously. Their attitudes are very good; progress is faster and attainment accelerates. It is even higher in the sixth form. There are variations between years, however, with lower standards in Year 7 where pupils also receive more unsatisfactory teaching. Students in Year 13 are attaining at a lower standard against course expectations than those in Year 12 and the teaching is also of higher quality in Year 12.
- 13 Attainment varies generally according to the set or band as would be expected. However, examination of the Cognitive Ability Test results for the current Year 7 shows a wider range of ability within teaching groups than might be expected. There are examples of skilled teaching of both low sets and mixed ability groups which enabled pupils to attain well above national expectations. This occurred in some French, geography and science lessons in Key Stage 3 and in art, economics and

food technology in Key Stage 4. The reverse happened with high attaining pupils who achieved little in a mathematics lesson because of lack of respect for the teacher. The comments in 1995 about underachievement in the bottom band in Key Stage 3 remain true and the situation is particularly problematic in Year 7. In Years 7 and 8 bottom band, classes contain a majority of pupils on the register of special educational needs. Groups, therefore, have pupils with wide-ranging learning and behavioural difficulties. Whilst the Learning Support Assistants provide substantial support this cannot compensate for the wide range of demands in these groups. In addition, some of the more able and diligent have become de-motivated by the slow pace which is necessary to meet the needs of their slower learning peers, the instances of poor behaviour and the lack of intellectual challenge. Their attainment and progress are suffering as a result. The smaller classes in Key Stage 4 and the use of more materials and resources designed to meet individual needs facilitate improved attainment.

- 14 The general work survey showed that high attaining pupils do well and make adequate progress although little outstanding work was seen. In general in Key Stage 3 presentation, handwriting and technical accuracy are weak and expectations are not made explicit when pupils join the school. The lack of a co-ordinated approach to literacy is a serious concern. Marking is poor in most subjects consisting of just ticks with a mark or grade. The lack of detailed commentary means that pupils lack clear guidance on both the standard of their work and how it can be improved. Only the most able pupils interviewed understood whether their work was of an appropriate standard. Spelling and punctuation errors are not corrected systematically and even high attaining pupils continue to make basic errors. Insufficient help with writing is given to lower attaining pupils with devices such as writing frames little used other than in English. Pupils rarely draft work, learn note-taking techniques nor do they write at length. Pupils have too few opportunities to develop numeracy skills across the curriculum. At Key Stage 4 standards improve overall, especially in Year 11 where course work is more carefully marked and pupils improve its presentation, often word-processing final drafts. Some very good work was seen in English where well structured, varied and interesting writing was a pleasure to read and art of considerable competence and originality was seen.
- 15 Pupils' examinations and test results are more impressive than their course work. In English, improvements are clear since 1995 but weaknesses in vocabulary, personal reading and technical accuracy remain. In mathematics, standards are more consistent apart from the lower band classes in Key Stage 3 and the early entry policy is not always effective. Standards in science remain well above national averages but they have fallen in the last three years at Key Stage 3 and also at Double Award GCSE. The most able do well. Standards in art are high at all levels. In design technology results are improving and in lessons seen standards were above national expectations, and well above in food technology and graphical communication. Standards are good in all key stages in geography. They are also good in Key Stage 3 and Advanced Level history and although students match the national average at Key Stage 4 results have dropped in the last two years. In lessons seen, standards were above average at all stages although more independent learning is needed. Although pupils attain well in Information and Communication Technology at Key Stage 3, lack of time and monitoring leads to unsatisfactory standards in Years 10 and 11. Results in modern languages match national averages and have improved since 1995 but pupils' speaking skills are inadequately developed at both key stages. Standards in music match national expectations at Key Stage 3 and rise above them at GCSE. Standards in physical

education are rising, particularly in lessons rather than examinations.

- 16 Pupils are not generally well read either to support their work in subjects or for pleasure. Library loans indicate a narrow range and some surprisingly immature reading tastes by older pupils. Pupils interviewed said they read little and this reduced still more as they moved into Year 9.
- 17 Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress throughout Key Stage 4. In some classes in Key Stage 3, when well supported, they also make progress. However, in the lower bands in Years 7 and 8, progress is unsatisfactory because numbers are too large to provide adequate support.
- 18 Pupils who use English as an additional language integrate well and make satisfactory progress.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

- 19 Attitudes, values and personal development were identified as strengths of the school in the last inspection. They remain so, with some aspects having been strengthened further. Pupils' attitudes towards school are very positive. Almost all are very happy, believe that St Simon Stock is a good school and would recommend it to friends and relations. Pupils speak warmly of the friendly atmosphere, sense of community and of being treated as individuals by most staff. Whilst pupils in all years can identify aspects of school life which they feel could be improved, all spoken to indicated a range of strengths of the school which outweighed the areas for improvement. Pupils are keen to come to school and involve themselves in all aspects of its life. The strong emphasis upon academic success is perceived correctly by pupils to be balanced by the strength of the school's pastoral care based upon Christian values and an in-depth knowledge of individuals and their families. The school quickly develops a sense of security. Pupils do not shy away from asking questions in lessons where they are unsure and make use of the range of opportunities for counselling provided by the chaplains and senior staff.
- 20 Behaviour is good in most lessons and around the school, at break and lunchtime, it is very good and often exemplary. Most parents indicated that the school encourages mature conduct and responsibility. However, whilst in most classes, pupils are attentive and responsive, although sometimes too passive, behaviour does vary. With some less experienced or less skilled teachers and in some lower ability groups, behaviour is unsatisfactory. This usually manifests itself in inattentiveness during teacher expositions and an underlying off-task chattiness, with some silliness in some lower school lower band groups. The rudeness shown in these lessons contrasts markedly with that seen in the vast majority of lessons where pupils show a good understanding of the impact of their actions on others.
- 21 Pupils, parents and staff indicated clearly that bullying and racist and sexist behaviour were not issues at St Simon Stock. All indicated that the occasional instances of bullying were dealt with speedily and effectively when brought to staff's attention. The small number of pupils from other cultures, are felt by senior managers to bring a valuable extra dimension to the school, as are the sizeable minority of non-Catholics. Pupils indicated that there is some light-hearted sexist teasing, but that this is dealt with effectively and not an issue. Boys and girls relate well to each other and work in mixed gender groups through choice in many classes, especially in the upper school and post 16.

- 22 Exclusions from the school are rare. There were only four in 1998-9, of which one was permanent. Unusually three of the four were girls. Senior staff suggest that girls may display greater willingness to challenge school values as a result of their greater maturity and exposure to outside pressures. The low level of exclusions, however, and calm atmosphere around the school epitomise the positive ethos that exists at St Simon Stock.
- 23 The strong pastoral support provided to pupils and positive ethos of the school, based upon strong Christian values, enhance pupils' personal development. When given the opportunity, pupils show initiative. However, in many lessons pupils are not given the opportunity to plan and organise their own work and as a result they become too dependent on teachers. This limitation to pupils' personal development in some classes sometimes impacts on their achievement at Key Stage 4 and in some cases post-16. When empowered to do so, pupils collaborate well with each other, but too often are discouraged from doing so, although sometimes older pupils ignore this discouragement. Sixth form students display mature attitudes to their work. This is exemplified by the GNVQ art course where the working atmosphere is comparable with that of the best higher education courses.
- 24 Upper school and post –16 students are provided with a range of opportunities to take responsibility within school. Sixth formers act as prefects and mentor younger pupils. There are effective upper school and sixth form committees and various other representative bodies. Three Year 11 pupils represent the school on the local Youth Forum. Younger pupils act as form captains and take responsibility for the register, collect homework or record latecomers. In all years there are sports captains. Many pupils participate in sports teams and become involved in school productions. Pupils are given opportunities to develop their interests. For example, some pupils play musical instruments in assembly and others take responsibility for the sound system and lighting of productions.
- 25 Pupils develop excellent relationships with each other and with the majority of teachers and other adults. They show respect for each other, except in some lower ability classes in the lower school. The head's description of the school as "very friendly" was apparent during the inspection. Pupils and staff made inspectors welcome and students in all years displayed great maturity in their dialogue with inspectors. Older pupils stressed the importance of mutual respect within school and suggested that this was missing with some teachers with some classes. This was confirmed by teaching and non-teaching staff in interviews and by observation in some lessons where a teacher appeared rather remote or failed to relate to the pupils' needs. Sometimes this manifests itself in what appears to older pupils to be on occasions a slightly petty over-reaction to pupils' shortcomings
- 26 Attendance was 93% at the time of the last inspection and rose to 93.9% last year. This is very good, with only 0.1% of absence unauthorised. The target is for it to rise above 95%, but this will only be met if the school successfully deters parents from taking their children on holidays during term-time. In 1995 attendance in the sixth form was identified as an issue. Whilst this has improved, especially in Year 12, attendance by some students in Year 13 remains an issue. Punctuality is reported to be improving. Once in school punctuality to lessons is good, but in some years punctuality first thing in the morning is unsatisfactory, although often this is a consequence of the unreliability of public transport because of congestion.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

- 27 At the time of the last inspection, teaching was found to be 'sound or better in well over four-fifths of lessons' with the best practice in Key Stage 4 and the weakest in Years 8 and 9 where one quarter had shortcomings including some lessons which were unchallenging and failed to support the least able. There were some concerns about 'spoon-feeding'. No subject had consistently high or poor quality teaching although some 'particularly outstanding' practice was seen in mathematics, languages, science and in GNVQ art.
- 28 Teaching was judged satisfactory or better in 94% of lessons seen. This included 23%, which were very good, 42% good and the remainder satisfactory. In only 13 lessons of the 199, 6% were unsatisfactory and the proportion of unsatisfactory lessons has halved since the last inspection. The quality improves in successive key stages with the best teaching now in the sixth form rather than Key Stage 4. In one third of sixth form lessons teaching was very good. There are examples of very good teaching in almost all subjects. There is good teaching in about two thirds of lessons in Years 9 and 10 and this increases to three quarters in Year 11 and slightly above this in the sixth form. Most of the unsatisfactory teaching was to the lower band classes in Key Stage 3. In Years 7 and 8 the proportion of good teaching falls below that found nationally with under a half good in Year 8.

In the core subjects of English, mathematics and science

- 29 The teaching in English is good overall with examples of both very good and unsatisfactory practice. The best lessons challenge and stimulate high attaining pupils with well-chosen texts and effective class discussion. In mathematics, teaching is satisfactory overall but there is both excellent and unsatisfactory practice. The majority of the weaker lessons were with lower band classes in Key Stage 3. The planning for the wide range of ability in these classes is insufficiently targeted to pupils' needs. Poor class management affected progress in several classes, including one with the most able mathematicians. Assessment procedures are weak and teachers' records of pupils' progress are inconsistently kept. Thus, teaching cannot always build on a detailed awareness of pupils' strengths and weaknesses. Science teaching is mainly sound with half of that seen, good. However, it was unsatisfactory or poor in one in every six lessons seen. Teachers have sound subject knowledge. The best lessons have clear shared aims. They challenge and inspire high-attaining pupils who work hard and enthusiastically. Materials and teaching methods have not always been well adapted to meet the learning needs of pupils in the lower ability bands in Key Stage 3 where most of the weaker teaching occurred. Marking is not always sufficiently rigorous or regular to assure standards. Teaching in art is good and occasionally inspirational in the sixth form. In design technology high expectations and skilful questioning marked the effective teaching. Geography lessons are well planned although more discussion and extended writing at Key Stage 3 are needed. Pupils are more actively involved in history lessons and have access to better resources although sixth formers do not benefit from enough debate and challenge. In dedicated ICT lessons at Key Stage 3 teaching is sound. Pupils are generally taught well in languages but they have too few opportunities to use the target language in many lessons. The teaching in music is good as it is in physical education. The teaching of business studies, economics and politics in the sixth form is good in Year 12 and satisfactory in Year 13.
- 30 Pupils' levels of literacy are affected by the lack of a whole school approach to the development of reading and writing skills. Pupils are not wide readers and relatively

few read for pleasure. Although the library stock is limited, the quality of what is available is good. Pupils are not encouraged to read fiction; indeed some staff stated that reading, as homework is not permitted. Details of library loans indicate limited reading of fiction and some surprisingly immature choices by older pupils of texts more commonly read in primary schools such as the 'Goosebumps' series and Roald Dahl's easier children's stories. As a result of this limited reading pupils, even the higher attainers, use a more limited vocabulary than could be expected. They are also not given many opportunities to practice research and retrieval skills in the lower school although a number search the Internet for relevant materials at home. One girl had independently found useful material on Macbeth to support her current lesson.

- 31 Poor presentation and weak technical accuracy often mar written work in the lower school. Expectations are not made sufficiently clear when pupils join the school and there is no whole school approach to either presentation or the correction of errors. Able pupils mainly produce neat and careful work, others are careless and the inadequate marking does not help them to improve. Not all teachers encourage pupils to neither write at length nor demonstrate how work could be better structured by the use of devices such as writing frames. Pupils are generally good listeners and contribute readily to class discussion. They have few opportunities to engage in extended and formal talk or role-play, nor do they acquire and refine voice and movement skills as part of a drama course. There is also no whole school numeracy policy and although it is well taught in mathematics and aspects are covered in science, geography and economics it is not sufficiently developed across the curriculum. Information and Communications Technology is not used enough especially at Key Stage 4.
- 32 Most teachers have good subject knowledge and plan well, especially for the more able groups. The wide range of ability in the lower band in Key Stage 3 is causing difficulties in a number of subjects and pupils are insufficiently challenged. However, there are examples in art and physical education where skilful teaching enabled these pupils to attain at above average levels. In other subjects, especially at Key Stage 4, the firm and fair relationships between the teacher and pupils, the active involvement of the Learning Support Assistants and the provision of materials adapted to individual needs enabled them to make sound progress.
- 33 The most effective teaching and learning seen involved pupils actively in acquiring and practising new skills with careful questioning by the teacher to check their understanding. Teachers in these lessons enjoyed good relationships with their classes; work proceeded briskly and humour was often present. Good examples were seen in physical education where the pace was fast with regular questioning by the teachers, demonstrations followed by refined practice and a final evaluation. The most effective French lessons involved paired discussion using only French. Varied and lively activities including group discussion on the dispute between Beckett and King Henry II provoked an enthusiastic response and effective learning in Year 8 history. The most successful English lessons also involved group and class discussion. In a lower band science lesson pupils were skilfully taken through a complex procedure relating to starch with palpable enjoyment. A similarly lively delivery with practical demonstration of technical terms helped another lower band geography group grasp the concepts of spurs when interpreting a map. A Year 9 ICT group enjoyed learning how to deliver a professional presentation with the use of graphics and animated text. At Key Stage 4, effective teaching followed a similar pattern with inter-active teaching a key feature. In economics paired discussion of business organisations moved quickly to group presentations to the class with careful

questioning from the teacher and other pupils. In sixth form art lessons teachers skilfully create an atmosphere of independent research, which leads to a range of highly individual and imaginative work.

- 34 The weaker lessons were characterised by a failure to adapt methods and materials to the needs of the class; a too lengthy exposition by the teacher, sometimes accompanied by the use of dictation or distribution of notes and, in a few instances, an inability to manage the class. Some of the teaching in Years 9 and 11 is overly dominated by teaching strictly to the demands of the examinations with a resultant narrowness in pupils' experiences.
- 35 Pupils with special educational needs in Key Stage 4 make better progress as groups tend to be smaller; they are spread more across the curriculum and teachers are able to meet their needs more effectively. In Key Stage 3 the larger groups of pupils with special needs in bottom band classes makes adequate support difficult and pupils make unsatisfactory progress.
- 36 There has been an improvement in teaching and learning since the last inspection. Teaching, however, remains rather better than learning as not all teachers feel able to set the pupils free to pursue independent lines of enquiry nor do they all give them detailed information about their attainment and how to improve further. With improved schemes of work, especially at Key Stage 3, a more careful consideration of the needs of pupils in the lower band and more direct observation of teaching to spread good practice more widely, both could become even better.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?

- 37 The last inspection report identified that the school day was shorter than the recommended time, that too little time was given to geography and history in Key Stage 3 and that the provision of two foreign languages for all in Key Stage 3 be reconsidered. The arrangements for teaching Personal Social and Health Education were commended.
- 38 There have been some improvements since 1995. The school day has been lengthened and lessons times also changed. The 50-minute period works well. The time given to geography and history has increased, but remains limited in Year 8. The study of two languages has been reconsidered but no change made.
- 39 There is a curriculum statement although it is not included in the Staff Handbook with the other policies. It contains an appropriate set of curriculum aims and emphasises equal access, early entries for GCSE examinations and that 10 per cent of time should be devoted to religious education. Beyond that it emphasises that the National Curriculum will be taught and that banding and setting will be used 'as appropriate'. The curriculum is to be extended through house activities and clubs. It lacks a rationale to guide the decisions taken where there is flexibility and which demonstrates the governors' priorities when the curriculum is planned.
- 40 At Key Stage 3 pupils are offered a reasonably broad and balanced curriculum and one which meets statutory requirements. Some issues remain:
- The time allocation to history and geography in Year 8 is inadequate and is having a detrimental effect on teaching styles and pupils' attainment.
 - The time allocated to languages is a very generous (16.7 per cent in Year 8 and

13.3 per cent in Year 9) when not all pupils are benefiting from the study of two languages.

- The creative and performing arts are given limited time with little teaching of drama and no dance in this key stage.

41 At Key Stage 4:

- 50 per cent of pupils do not take the statutory design technology
- There is no mapping and assessment of pupils Information and Communications Technology skills across the curriculum and pupils receive too little teaching in this core skill.
- There is no provision for pupils interested in more vocational courses.
- Pupils do not all choose a balanced programme in the range of optional subjects and some select ones with overlapping content (economics and business studies) and others two subjects with single certification (art and textiles). There is a recommendation but no insistence on the selection of an arts subject or a humanities.
- The time allocated to general physical education is short and limits teaching possibilities and the GCSE course has not been available to the full ability range.

42 The sixth form is offered a good range of Advanced Level subjects but the GNVQ courses are limited despite earlier planned diversification. Parents also expressed concerns about this with some indicating that their children had to move to other schools to find acceptable courses of study and they regretted this.

43 The last report also drew attention to the grouping of pupils. Some unsatisfactory elements remain. Pupils on entry are placed in mixed ability house tutor groups in which they are registered and taught Personal Social and Health Education as part of form period. No other lessons take place in these groups and this provides a fractured experience for pupils at the start of their secondary school careers. Staff were not able to provide a rationale for this arrangement. Given that the overall ability range in the school is relatively narrow and that some subjects such as art, music, physical education and technology will be teaching groups of mixed ability by their nature this decision remains surprising.

44 Pupils are taught in two bands-the 'upper' and 'middle'. Both receive the same curriculum. Most of the pupils with special educational needs are concentrated in the bottom two groups. This is demanding for their teachers and it also prevents such pupils from benefiting from the example and enrichment of their more able peers. The subject reports indicate that it is with these groups that teaching and learning are sometimes problematic. The Learning Support Assistants provide significant support for these pupils but the large numbers needing help and those with challenging behaviour sometimes frustrate their efforts. The Social Use of Language Programme is used effectively in one withdrawal session each week for a small group of pupils with special needs from Year 7 and also in a form period for pupils in Year 8. Additional support is provided for one to one reading development during one form period each week for pupils with lowest reading ages. Pupils have a good opportunity to develop both basic skills of reading, spelling and number as well as oracy and social skills in a lunchtime club. Here, the Assistants provide a good range of resources and keep records of attendance and work done, but unfortunately not all pupils who could benefit from this provision do so since participation is voluntary.

- 45 There is an effective programme of personal and social and health education (PSHE) delivered to pupils by form tutors during some afternoon tutor periods. The programme, which is clearly defined in the lower and upper school handbooks, is wide ranging and includes the delivery of health, drug, sex, moral and careers education as well as covering citizenship, study skills, target setting and supporting pupils in revising for external assessments. There are clear aims and objectives for each year's programme. For example, in Year 7 "promoting a sense of security and well being, laying foundations for personal growth, establishing a caring community, developing study skills and developing individual autonomy." Teachers are supported in delivering the course by a detailed scheme of work, numerous worksheets and regular discussion at lower and upper school meetings. The scheme encourages a methodology based upon active learning strategies, including group and paired work and discussion. However, middle managers only monitor the delivery informally, resulting in variation in its quality, with some classes experiencing too many worksheet based or teacher led activities without appropriate opportunities for discussion of issues. Outside speakers are used to enhance the programme. The programme is also delivered through assemblies, religious education lessons and in Year 11 through days of reflection. Moral values and sex education are discussed in a Catholic context.
- 46 Within the PSHE course there is a well-structured programme of careers education organised by the teacher in charge in the main school and the head of sixth form post-16. Good use is made of links with the careers service and students are well prepared for the moves into post 16 and higher education. There is a flourishing work experience programme in Year 10, with a wide range of placements negotiated with pupils. Students in GNVQ business studies, post 16, also undertake work experience and those in GNVQ art develop appropriate links and experiences to support their move to higher education or work. Through both schemes very good links have been developed with industry and commerce.
- 47 Most sixth form students undertake weekly community service, working with children, the elderly or infirm. Pupils provide musical performances and other entertainment for senior citizens and a local hospice and in all years significant sums of money are collected for charities. During the inspection a large cheque was handed over to support the homeless, raised by an upper school "sleep in " in the main hall one night. Some upper school pupils represent the school on the Maidstone Youth Forum. However, there are few links with the community provided for lower school pupils. Whilst there are examples of the community contributing to pupils' learning in a variety of subjects, these could be developed further.
- 48 The school has developed very good links with its feeder primary schools, despite having pupils from schools over a wide area of Kent. It also has good links with Christchurch, Canterbury, where most students undertaking initial teacher training come from, and is developing links through the Open University.
- 49 Overall the provision for extra-curricular activities is satisfactory, with good provision in art, music and physical education. Visits are arranged to the theatre and opera at Glyndebourne. Visits take place as part of the curriculum and a humanities trip by Year 7 pupils to Dover Castle is planned. Pupils visit Rochester Castle and town in connection with their history and geography work. Pupils travel abroad and there have been visits to Bruges and the Loire Valley. Ski trips and other holidays are also arranged. There is a well-attended homework club, which is open to Key Stage 3 pupils. A number of staff give extra lessons to their examination classes during the

holiday periods. There are a number of clubs and societies, including art and pottery, mathematics, computing and chess and also inter-house sport, drama, dance, music and art competitions.

- 50 There is satisfactory provision overall for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The provision for pupils' spiritual development is satisfactory. School assemblies promote a strong sense of corporate identity and calm. Pupils gain spiritual awareness through appropriate assembly themes, which are relevant to their lives. In a lower school assembly pupils were asked the question, "Is there somebody in your life that you can trust?" Two examples of trust were given, one in the Old Testament story of Abraham and Isaac and the other in the New Testament story of God's trust in Joseph, as a foster father to Jesus. Opportunity was given for pupils to reflect on the assembly message and to consider how they might trust in God throughout the day. Form time prayers, which occur both morning and afternoon, enable pupils to pray for others and to share experiences. Overall, the subjects of the curriculum make a limited contribution to pupils' spiritual development. There are examples of provision within some curriculum subjects, but this provision is not so evident in others. In art, pupils are made aware of the effect of colour and design and are given the opportunity to celebrate other's achievements in the subject. In music, pupils are introduced to the different combinations of sounds associated with the gamelan music of Indonesia. These experiences enable pupils to increase their understanding and to develop their appreciation of life in the world around them. The school meets the statutory requirements to provide a daily act of collective worship.
- 51 The provision for pupils' moral development is good. Honesty, fairness, tolerance and mutual respect are fostered well within the school community. Pupils are part of a secure and positive environment. Effective policies are in place to promote good behaviour and there are well thought out procedures for dealing with problems. Pupils are taught to know the difference between right and wrong and are made aware of the consequences of their actions. Environmental issues are dealt with satisfactorily and pupils are taught about their responsibilities in taking care of the world. Staff provide good role models for pupils.
- 52 The provision for pupils' social development is good. Many lessons provide opportunities for pupils to work in groups and extra-curricular provision further develops their social skills. The previous inspection report highlighted the need to give pupils more responsibility in Key Stage 3 and this has now been successfully addressed. Year 9 pupils assist pupils in Year 7 and show parents round the school, when required. Pupils help in the library and organise the music for assemblies. Pupils throughout the school are given the opportunity to show initiative. They collect well for charities, including the Heart of Kent Hospice, Barnardos and Mozambique. Pupils are made aware of the needs of the community outside school. Students in Year 12 participate in community service including voluntary work in hospitals and helping older people with gardening and shopping.
- 53 The provision for cultural development is satisfactory. Good provision is made in art and music and during book week there are visits from authors and poets. Pupils are provided with opportunities to appreciate the diversity and richness of other cultures within the curriculum. Pupils in Year 9 learn about the American Plains Indians and in all years good emphasis is placed on listening to and understanding music from around the world. Personal and social education covers many important issues, which are met in the wider society outside school, including racism. The school has been successful in improving the provision for pupils' multi-cultural development. This

was identified as a weakness in the previous inspection report.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

- 54 The school cares very well for its pupils, as it was judged to do at the time of the last inspection. Parents value the care with which the students are inducted into the school and the high quality of the support and guidance they receive at the critical stages of their education thereafter. However this favourable situation is not supported by assessment procedures which are unsatisfactory.
- 55 The school provides a safe environment with good supervision at break times and before and after the school day. The governors have a Health and Safety Committee and are vigilant on safety matters. The Premises Manager is conscious of potential hazards and deals immediately with any which occur. All the expected safety precautions are in place, including advice on safety on school trips.
- 56 There is a good policy on behaviour based upon mutual respect and emphasising the presence of Christ. There is an effective policy on bullying and a separate discipline policy. The latter places too great an emphasis on sanctions rather than rewards. In practice, rewards are used well, especially in the lower school. The discipline policy is augmented by a useful questionnaire to help staff experiencing difficulties to analyse the reasons for them. However, pastoral heads indicated that a few staff were too keen to pass on problems rather than deal with them themselves.
- 57 Pupils are rewarded for good attendance with both individual and group awards, including vouchers for 100% attendance over a year. The school works closely with its education welfare officer and monitors closely any individuals with attendance below 85%. At any one time the EWO deals with less than ten cases. Effective strategies are in place to encourage good attendance and support pupils' positive attitudes towards school.
- 58 Arrangements for child protection are very good. One of the deputy headteachers is the nominated person for child protection. She has been appropriately trained, is familiar with local procedures and has established good contacts with the appropriate agencies. All staff are aware of her role and have experienced training within the school on the warning signs of child abuse and how to proceed if a child starts to divulge details of possible abuse. There are currently no students on the 'at risk' register, but details of the procedures followed in most recent cases demonstrate the thoroughness and sensitivity of the school in exercising its duty of care in these matters.

- 59 Students' personal development is very well supported by the highly effective pastoral heads ably supported by their deputies. Most students are well supported and guided by their tutors on pastoral matters. The heads of each key stage and their deputies meet weekly with the deputy headteacher to discuss issues of care, guidance and pastoral support. The Pastoral Board, a wider group, meets monthly. Its main discussion points during the inspection were the need to explore every possible alternative before exclusion, the care needed by students with Asperger's Syndrome, and the reasons why students have poor attendance records. It is a strong feature of the school's provision that personal development is given equal weight alongside high academic achievement.
- 60 Procedures to promote good attendance are very effective. The deputy headteacher takes a strong leadership role, knows all the students well and wisely suggests strategies to maximise their attendance. She has set a challenging target for this academic year and progress towards it is well publicised. Attendance data is well monitored and the distinction between authorised and unauthorised absence well understood.
- 61 The procedures for monitoring and promoting positive behaviour are good. All students are expected to take responsibility for their own actions and this is the basis of discussion if a student steps out of line. This is backed up by almost universal good classroom practice and by most staff being good role models. A contributory factor is the very good relationships between staff and pupils that exist in most classes. Form tutors become aware of both good and bad behaviour from a system of yellow slips that are often issued by teachers. These are also sent to parents on occasions, and parents are sometimes brought in to discuss behaviour problems. Bullying is tackled sensitively but firmly on an individual basis. Its causes and avoidance are tackled in assemblies and within the personal and social education programme. There is no evidence of racism and boys and girls nearly always treat each other with respect and as equals. Mentors, senior students who are also prefects, are trained and give advice or resolve disputes between pupils. This is a good example of the way in which the sixth form is integrated with the rest of the school
- 62 The monitoring of students' personal development is unsatisfactory, as it is largely informal. There is no written record of personal qualities such as perseverance or initiative, but reports do analyse effort and behaviour. Pupils' confidential files are not well kept in Years 7-11. Information is dispersed and they do not provide an adequate all-round picture of an individual pupil's progress or social development.
- 63 Academic assessment is very variable and unsatisfactory in Key Stages 3 and 4. In some subjects such as history, information and communication technology, and mathematics it is unsatisfactory, and in others, such as modern foreign languages, art and science it is good. Within faculties assessment varies from teacher to teacher and there is no standardised procedure for the whole school. However in the sixth form assessment is uniformly very good. The school is conscious of some of the deficiencies and is planning to track pupils through the school. They have made a start with Year 7 and Cognitive Ability Test and reading scores have just been repeated.

- 64 New entrants to the school in Year 7 are tested for reading, spelling and mathematics. These results, together with the results of Key Stage 2 national tests, are used to place the students in attainment groups that stay together for all lessons in each of the three classes for lower attainers. Students in the attainment groups containing the higher attainers are also in groups selected for attainment in specific subjects.
- 65 Information on academic attainment rarely reaches form tutors in Key Stage 3, so opportunities for advising students on their educational progress are limited. In Year 10 termly summary sheets give limited information on each subject studied, facilitating advice by form tutors to their pupils. In Year 11 summaries of expected GCSE attainment are made two or three times a term. In the sixth form there is a much more comprehensive analysis carried out twice per term, and this is very good practice.
- 66 Satisfactory procedures are in place for monitoring the progress of pupils with special educational needs in meeting targets in their Individual Education Plans but not in monitoring their academic performance. Parents are kept informed of the outcome of any in-school reviews and are involved in the annual reviews but no information is given in annual reports about progress in relation to their children's targets; hence, for the large number of pupils at Stage 1 of the Code of Practice, there is no regular written communication about their progress
- 67 Marking is generally unsatisfactory. Helpful comments are too infrequent, although modern foreign languages and English are examples of better practice. Work is marked in a variety of ways, often without a clear reference standard. The most helpful marking relates the work to a GCSE grade or a National Curriculum level, but this is not consistent. A failure to identify or correct serious errors was the most widespread fault in the books examined; it was particularly noticeable when fundamental errors in written English arose in many.
- 68 Assessment information is used to guide and refine the allocation of students to teaching groups, although this is limited in scope because students in the lower attaining bands in Key Stage 3 move only upwards and none from the upper band is demoted. Otherwise the use of assessment information to guide curricular planning is undeveloped and is unsatisfactory.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

- 69 The school works well with parents as it did at the last inspection. They, in turn, are nearly always enthusiastic and appreciative of the school's commitment to high academic standards and pastoral care. Parents are most satisfied with the ethos of hard work, the approachability of the staff, the quality of leadership and management, the encouragement of maturity and responsibility and the progress made by their sons and daughters. One fifth of parents who answered the questionnaire were critical of the range of extra-curricular activities. One sixth were unhappy about homework and one eighth felt that the school did not work closely with parents. At the meeting for parents there was widespread dissatisfaction with computer generated reports. The inspection team concluded that the range of extra-curricular activities is satisfactory, that the school's use of homework is good but not always its marking, that the leadership and management has weaknesses in some areas, and agrees that reports are unsatisfactory. Parents are little involved in the day to day life

of the school but attend events related to their children in large numbers.

- 70 Other issues raised were the 'inflexible' banding arrangements with pupils said to 'languish in low sets' and 'high flyers' said to 'get all the attention'. Some felt attainment should be even higher given the ability of the pupils. The mentoring by sixth form pupils was thought especially effective.
- 71 The school provides parents with much information on choices at GCSE and Advanced Level GCE. There are very well presented governors' annual reports to parents with much interesting information provided in a readily accessible manner. Frequent newsletters keep parents up to date with happenings at the school. This quality material is not matched by reports on pupils' progress, which contain few targets for improvement, attainments expressed in units that have no frame of reference that parents can relate to and give no advice on how students might improve. The language used lacks a real sensitivity to the individual child. There is no easy way to access all aspects of a student's performance or progress. National Curriculum levels and forecast GCSE grades are rarely used. The school acknowledged the weaknesses and a group is to meet to consider alternatives.
- 72 The level of direct parental involvement in the life of the school is satisfactory and has a favourable impact on students' learning. Parents make generous donations to the School Fund, which finances educational visits and journeys. These cost some £150,000 per annum. Parents are made most welcome in the school and receive a sympathetic response to any problems raised. Homework diaries are well used by students to record their homework, but these are not always signed sufficiently regularly by tutors and parents thus losing the opportunity for regular dialogue between home and school. Although home school contracts are in place, the formal expression of their partnership has not as yet conferred any recognisable benefits. Parents' evenings coincide with examinations or tests and are generally felt to be helpful. Parents of pupils in Year 7 are also invited to a social evening by the parent-teacher association.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

- 73 The absence of the Head before and during the inspection meant that only the effects of his leadership could be examined. Governors and staff said the Head gives very strong leadership. They appreciate his commitment to the school and respect his 'top down' management style. The school continued to run smoothly in his absence and day to day organisation and management are sound. The administrative staff are welcoming and efficient. A detailed and practical staff handbook helps practice with especially strong sections on behaviour management but not all the policies are uniformly implemented.
- 74 A strong emphasis is placed on pastoral care with pupils known well to staff and any difficult personal circumstances handled with great sensitivity. A governors' committee considers pupils experiencing social and emotional problems. Chaplains provide additional personal support which pupils value. This emphasis develops the strong sense of community apparent in the school and influences the good behaviour.
- 75 Pupils, parents and staff are clear that the school values hard work and that examination success is very important. Pupils accept this and their concern to do well enables them in Key Stage 4, in particular, to work diligently even in some lessons

which are rather dull. The school's perceived need to compete with the local grammar schools has a profound effect on its operations. Teaching in examination years is heavily influenced by the need to do well and preparation is meticulous. In some cases, this can lead to over-preparation with pupils being told what to think and how to phrase their answers so that the spark of originality and creativity is lost. The school's aim of developing pupils with 'lively, enquiring minds' is not met in most subjects. The school is aware that there are some shortcomings in teaching styles and has prioritised more active learning styles in the current development plan.

- 76 The management of the curriculum is weak. Statutory requirements are not met in Key Stage 4 in technology nor are pupils' levels of attainment in Information and Communication Technology mapped, monitored and assessed as is required. ICT was a weakness at the time of the last inspection and there has been no improvement. The Key Stage 3 programme also has problems, which impact on attainment in the humanities subjects, and for pupils with special educational needs. The creative and performing arts are under-represented although all pupils continue to study two languages when a number are struggling with one. The development plan indicates that the languages provision is to be reviewed again.
- 77 The division of responsibilities at deputy head level into pastoral and curricular roles is not currently effective. The curriculum is an onerous responsibility. At present, oversight of the work of faculty heads is neither systematic nor sufficiently rigorous.
- 78 The governors are committed to the school and work hard on its behalf. They have produced attractive and informative annual reports. There are appropriate committees and the minutes show debate to be wide-ranging and particularly detailed on finance, buildings and site development and student welfare. The curriculum committee has had useful discussions on aspects of the curriculum led by school staff but has not discussed the overall curriculum nor considered the imminent changes other than in the sixth form. Governors do not all feel the curriculum is an area in which they should be involved as it is a 'professional' matter. This has led them to question practice less than in other aspects of school organisation and management. They appreciate that the school's strengths lie in its pastoral care. As yet, they do not visit in school time and feel uneasy about doing so. They have failed to ensure progress on the key issues in the last report and this is of concern.
- 79 Monitoring and evaluation of performance is a weakness at all levels. Examination results are scrutinised and the required targets set. However, the variation from year to year is acknowledged but there is no targeted action to achieve greater consistency. Senior managers do not ensure that middle managers are carrying out their accountability role by themselves operating whole school monitoring activities supported by the separate but regular scrutiny by faculty heads. As a result there is great inconsistency in practice as the school acknowledges.
- 80 Some faculty heads lead their teams well and improvements are clear since the last inspection in art, technology, music and physical education. Others fail to give adequate guidance to their staff by, for example, not providing schemes of work believing that each teacher is a professional and should determine the programme for themselves. This leads to repetition of content and insecure progression through the attainment targets as is occurring in English. Most do not monitor consistently the quality of teaching or pupils' work other than for moderation for examination purposes. Heads of faculty do not have up to date job descriptions and this is unhelpful where responsibilities cross subject boundaries as in humanities resulting in

nobody having clear overall control for the educational direction in geography. The introduction of line management procedures is helpful, but its operation needs to be demonstrated at the most senior level for it to be an effective tool of school improvement. This weakness was identified in the last inspection.

- 81 The new Co-ordinator for Special Needs has made some significant contributions since taking up her post, for example by bringing in experienced outreach workers to support pupils with significant behavioural and learning difficulties and by arranging for special needs issues to be put on the agendas of all faculty meetings. Procedures remain inadequate for monitoring pupils' academic progress, ensuring that all teachers make use of Individual Education Plans, that all faculties provide appropriate curriculum diversity and that pupils' targets are subject-specific.
- 82 The current school development plan starts well by considering the school's aims and the threats and opportunities posed by the current environment, but it does not follow this through in a logical fashion to identify the most important developmental needs based on the school's perceived weaknesses. The lists of developments which follow are classified under a number of headings, allocated broadly to specific years. Some are extremely broad 'improve quality of all aspects of homework' and others quite narrow 'assess reading and spelling in year 9'. No one is named as the person responsible for the development, progress is rarely reviewed formally, and there are no priorities stated, no quantifiable success criteria and no costing. The position is confused by the issue in the staff handbook of another set of development priorities for the current year. These only sometimes relate to the Development Plan and sometimes continue from year to year. As a consequence, departmental plans do not relate consistently to the whole school plan. Staff interviewed were uncertain of the current priorities and did not feel they had much involvement in their selection. The development plan is only included in the budget for major capital expenditure, for example the new toilet block was included in the 1999/2000 budget because it was being financed from reserves. The failure to link the development plan with finance was a key issue in the last inspection.
- 83 The school makes sound strategic use of its resources. Financial controls are very good. Its cost per pupil is on a par with schools that are similarly funded and its income is currently in line with its expenditure. Funding is apportioned fairly to each key stage, as far as can be judged, although neither the sixth form nor special needs is treated as a separate cost centre. However, despite some very small teaching groups, the sixth form is cost effective. Specific grants are spent for the purposes granted. The principles of best value are well known to the deputy headteacher, who gives good exemplification to each of the four categories. New technology is well used for the school's administrative and financial procedures. The financial information provided to governors is comprehensive, covering the current position on the accounts and capital expenditure.
- 84 The match of qualifications and experience of the teaching staff to the needs of the school is good. They are appropriately qualified, except that there is no member of staff with an information technology qualification who teaches the subject. There is currently no design technology technician and this is affecting the quality of pupils' work.

- 85 The support assistants for pupils with special educational needs are sufficient in number and strong in commitment. The school should continue to support relevant training for them and consider ways in which some assistance from qualified specialist teachers could be provided to help ensure equality of opportunity for SEN pupils as was recommended in the last report.
- 86 The induction procedures for new staff are very good. They receive training, are carefully observed and monitored while teaching and offered constructive criticism. They appreciate the advice they receive from their mentors. Staff development is largely driven by the needs of the Development Plan. Since the loss of Grant Maintained status the budget for staff training has been halved, although some needs identified during appraisal are still being met.
- 87 The appraisal system in use is one developed and valued by the school for its own use but it does not follow statutory guidelines. It includes classroom observation and an interview with the teacher's immediate superior but reports are not passed to the Head.
- 88 Support provided by the Local Education Authority is valued, particularly the Education Welfare Office, the Educational Psychologist and the Behaviour Support Team.
- 89 The school benefits from a spacious site although the buildings are of poorer quality and require refurbishment. Accommodation deficiencies continue to have an adverse effect on learning. In science two very small classrooms hinder the interaction between students and teachers. In music the practice rooms are invaded by the seriously noisy efforts of gymnasts and basketball players. The art room is dilapidated. English rooms are scattered round the school and facilities for teaching media studies are limited. Modern foreign language facilities are inadequate. The general impression of the school once outside the attractive entrance is of drabness and poorly maintained buildings with worn and dirty floor covering on staircases. Staff and pupils have worked hard to enliven rooms and corridors with attractive displays and murals. The school has plans to address most of these problems when finance has been obtained.
- 90 Resources are adequate in most subjects. The only exception is design technology, where the current lack of a technician is causing problems with equipment maintenance.
- 91 The library has fewer books than is appropriate for the size of the school and a low budget. The books available are appropriate although there are deficiencies in history, and languages and few books on sport, which are often a valuable way of introducing boys to enjoying libraries. Provision of CD-ROMs and other non-book materials is poor.
- 92 The school is committed to continued improvement and has targeted teaching and learning styles. Although there have been improvements in both attainment and teaching since the last inspection concerns remain about the lack of secure strategies and commitment by the governors and senior staff to ensure that the upward trend continues.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

93 The governors, senior management and staff with the help of the Local Education Authority should:

- **Raise the achievement of lower attaining pupils at Key Stage 3 and the attainment of all pupils at Key Stage 4 to the levels achieved in similar schools by:**
 - improving the grouping of pupils in Years 7-9 to ensure those with special educational needs receive more effective support (Paragraphs 13, 17, 28, 32, 35, 43-44, 66, 70, 81, 107, 132, 139, 175, 179)
 - improving the quality of teaching at Key Stage 3 of lower attaining pupils to ensure their needs are better met, particularly in mathematics and science. (Paragraphs 2, 29, 129-130, 135)
 - ensuring all teachers mark pupils' work regularly and consistently and that the marking gives pupils clear guidance of the standard of their work and how it could be improved. (Paragraphs 14, 29, 67, 135, 139, 170, 179)
 - disseminating attainment data and making better use of on-going assessment information especially at Key Stage 3 to identify differences in individual and group performance and guide curriculum planning (Paragraphs 6, 29, 36, 62-63, 65, 68, 165, 172)
 - ensuring the curriculum meets the requirements for teaching design and technology and information communication technology at Key Stage 4. (Paragraphs 41, 76, 181, 142)
 - improving the quality and range of learning opportunities at both key stages, the time given to individual subjects, the breadth and balance of the Key Stage 4 curriculum and the breadth of the GNVQ programme in the Sixth Form. (Paragraphs 23, 27, 29, 31, 33-34, 36, 38-42, 75, 77, 84, 107, 109, 170, 176, 199, 224)
- **Agree and implement a systematic strategy for the regular monitoring and evaluation of teaching and the quality of pupils' work and take action on the findings.** (Paragraphs 10, 76, 78, 112, 132, 202)
- **Improve strategic planning and whole school management by preparing a longer term corporately agreed development plan based on an analysis of the weaker aspects of provision and examination results. This should be costed; have named people responsible for key aspects; review dates and quantifiable success criteria.** (Paragraphs 4 & 82)
- **Ensure that all management roles are clearly defined; that the responsibilities linked to them are carried out effectively and that all staff understand them.**
(Paragraphs 77-78, 80, 171)

In addition the following paragraphs include weaknesses not included above but which governors should consider including in their post-inspection plan;

Reports to parents (Paragraph 71)

Pupils' academic records (Paragraphs 62 & 63)

The library (Paragraph 91)

Literacy and numeracy (Paragraphs 14, 15, 104, 125, 149, 170)

Accommodation (Paragraph 89)

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

The Sixth Form

- 93 The sixth form is a strength of the school. Almost all pupils choose to remain at the school post-16 despite a variety of alternative opportunities. The provision is cost effective as larger ones and the teaching of Years 12 and 13 balance the few small groups together for some subjects for part of the week.
- 94 Pupils are offered a wide range of Advanced Level courses which cover all the main disciplines and newer subjects such as media studies have been added. Group sizes are uneconomically small in some subjects such as music, French, chemistry, general studies and design technology and this limits discussion and debate. The GNVQ courses offered at both Advanced and Intermediate levels are popular and successful. Almost a third of pupils are studying GNVQs and progression between the levels is good. However, although the need to expand the range of subjects offered is clearly understood there is no concerted view on what to add and staff spoke of quite different priorities.
- 95 All pupils also take a range of compulsory additional subjects including religious education, physical education and community service. They can also resit English and mathematics at GCSE level to improve their grades. The Personal and Social Education Programme is less successful at this stage. There are few organised cultural activities although a debating society has just been re-established. The mentoring programme for which sixth formers are trained by the deputy head is well regarded by younger pupils and parents.
- 96 Results have been improving and in 1999 attainment was well above national averages. Standards have risen since the last inspection although the school anticipates a fall this year because of a weaker cohort. Inspection findings confirm significantly higher attainment in Year 12. Interestingly the teaching seen was also much better in Year 12 and characterised by more active approaches and debate. Monitoring of academic progress is good with regular grade sheets and target setting. About 80% of Year 13 continue into higher education.
- 97 Students are given many opportunities to take responsibility and they do so with enthusiasm and commitment. They are very appreciative of the training given in mentoring skills. In interviews they expressed very positive feelings about the school.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	199
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	78

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
3.5	19	42	29	6	0.5	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	813	199
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	40	

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y13	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	19	N/A
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	252	N/A

English as an additional language	Number of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	7

Pupil mobility in the last school year	Number of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	22
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	32

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.9
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	94	73	167

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	82	76	69
	Girls	65	55	46
	Total	147	131	115
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	89 (88)	79 (76)	69 (79)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	47 (58)	54 (47)	32 (42)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	73	79	67
	Girls	63	61	46
	Total	136	140	113
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	82 (85)	84 (90)	68 (84)
	National	64 (61)	64 (64)	60 (61)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	48 (44)	64 (55)	34 (41)
	National	31 (30)	37 (37)	28 (30)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	91	86	177

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	57	86	86
	Girls	50	83	84
	Total	107	169	170
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	63 (53.1)	97.7 (98)	99.4
	National	46.3 (44.6)	90.7 (89.8)	95.7

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	44.7 (39.4)
	National	37.8 (36.8)

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
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latest reporting year

who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations

1999	34	47	81

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	19.6	19.0	19.2 (18.5)	6.2	2	3.9 (4.2)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (2.8)

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	34	91
	National		N/A

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	2
Indian	3
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	993
Any other minority ethnic group	10

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	55
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7-Y11

Total number of education support staff	17
Total aggregate hours worked per week	

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.4
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Average teaching group size: Y7-Y11

Key Stage 3	24
Key Stage 4	20.1

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	3	1
Other minority ethnic groups		

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Financial information

Financial year	1998-99
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	£
Total income	2614854
Total expenditure	2634537
Expenditure per pupil	2583
Balance brought forward from previous year	114683
Balance carried forward to next year	95000

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1012
Number of questionnaires returned	297

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	45	46	7	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	53	42	4	0.5	0.5
Behaviour in the school is good.	38	48	9	2	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	33	50	14	2.5	0.5
The teaching is good.	41	52	5	0.5	1.5
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	39	47	11	2.7	0.3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	59	34	6	0.5	0.5
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	68	30	0.5	1	0.5
The school works closely with parents.	34	53	10	2	1
The school is well led and managed.	59	36	4.5	0.5	0.5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	55	39	3	1	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	26	42	17	3	13

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

Parents are generally very satisfied with the school's pastoral provision and expressed this equally strongly at the meeting, which was attended by parents with children in the upper band or the sixth form. The inspection team endorses all the strengths apart from the curriculum aspect of leadership but not all of the aspects causing some concern. Homework was not found to be problematic although the quality of marking was. The team agrees with the poor quality of the computer-generated reports, which fail to give details of pupil's attainment against national norms and are impersonal in tone a sharp contrast with the generally warm relationships within the school. Extra-curricular activities are limited in range but well attended. Behaviour was generally good apart from some off-task chatting and inappropriate reactions to temporary and some new teachers. Parents are little involved in the daily life of the school but attend events specific to their children.

Other issues raised by parents

Other issues raised were the banding arrangements and their 'inflexibility' with pupils said to 'languish in low sets' and 'high flyers get all the attention'. Some felt attainment should be even higher given the ability of the pupils. The mentoring by sixth form pupils was thought especially effective.

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

ENGLISH

- 98 In the 1999 end of Key Stage 3 tests for 14 year old pupils, the proportion achieving the national average (Level 5) and the higher levels 6 and 7, was well above the national average. Pupils achieved results well above those of similar schools. Although results over three years have remained much the same, there has been a considerable improvement in attainment since the last inspection and both boys and girls are achieving standards above their respective national averages. Inspection evidence is of a wide range of attainment, with pupils making good progress and achieving standards above the national expectation by the end of the key stage.
- 99 In the 1999 GCSE English language and literature examinations, the proportion of pupils achieving A* to C grade passes is well above the national average. There has been a steady improvement in these results since the last report, with a substantial improvement in 1999 (11 per cent in English language and 28 per cent in English literature). The attainment of both boys and girls is well above their respective national averages. Boys' attainment is far higher than boys' are elsewhere and they also gain better results than in their other subjects. Inspection evidence reflects these results; pupils make good progress and attainment is above the national average by the end of the key stage.
- 100 The provision for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory with some specialist as well as mainstream provision. There are weaknesses in the consistency of provision within mainstream classes, which adversely affects the progress of these pupils. For example, there is often support provided, but the class activities and teaching materials are not always sufficiently well adapted to the needs of these pupils. However, most pupils make satisfactory progress and achieve standards that are commensurate with their capabilities by the end of Key Stage 4.
- 101 All students passed the GCE Advanced Level examination in 1999 and the proportion attaining the higher A and B was well above the national average. The significant rise in the proportion achieving A and B grades in 1998 has been maintained and improved upon in 1999. Inspection evidence reflects the range of student attainment on the Advanced Level course and, by the end of the key stage, attainment is above the national expectation.
- 102 Speaking and listening skills are in line with national expectations in Key Stage 3 and above the national expectation in Key Stage 4. As pupils progress through the key stages, they gain in confidence and most become fluent and articulate. Listening is a particular strength in both key stages; pupils listen attentively and respond thoughtfully. The inter-active style of teaching adopted throughout the department enhances the development of these skills. Speaking and listening skills are above the national expectation in the Sixth Form. At the time of the last report, the breadth and use of a wider vocabulary was a weakness and this remains.
- 103 Reading skills are in line with the national expectation in Key Stage 3 and above it in Key Stage 4. Most pupils read fluently, accurately and with increasing confidence by the end of Key Stage 3. A close examination of text is a predominant teaching style and this encourages the development of accurate, expressive reading and a sensitive appreciation of text. A strength is pupils' ability to give personal and critical

responses. A significant weakness is pupils' breadth of reading. There is insufficient reading for pleasure and the school does not have an effective strategy to fully develop an appropriate breadth of reading for pupils of all abilities.

- 104 The quality of most pupils' writing is above average in both key stages. At the time of the last report, the quality of pupils' writing was variable and writing was within a narrow range of writing styles. There has been a significant improvement in the range of writing, particularly in Key Stage 3. Teachers provide creative activities to encourage and sustain writing in a range of styles and for different audiences and emphasise the importance of drafting and redrafting work. As a consequence, most pupils' writing is well structured, varied and interesting, particularly in Key Stage 4. At the time of the last inspection, attainment in writing in Key Stage 3 was restricted by persistent errors in syntax, spelling and punctuation and this is still the case for average and lower attaining pupils. A reason for this is the lack of a programme of work to provide for the systematic and progressive development of these basic skills. Most pupils take a pride in their work, their handwriting is fluent and legible and presentation is neat. The quality of writing in the Sixth Form is above the national expectation. More generally, pupils' literacy skills in oracy, reading and writing are sufficient to sustain satisfactory progress in other subjects.
- 105 The quality of teaching is better and more consistent in Key Stage 4 than in Key Stage 3 and better still in the sixth form where all is at least good and two thirds very good. The quality of teaching and the progress pupils make in their learning is satisfactory in 90 per cent of lessons and is good in 60 per cent of lessons. A third of the teaching is very good and there is a small amount of excellent and unsatisfactory teaching.
- 106 Learning is most effective in lessons where teachers have a good command of their subject, build positive personal relations and have high expectations of pupils. These qualities are reflected in the confidence with which pupils try out ideas and take risks. For example in a lesson considering poems with a similar theme, pupils were enabled to make connections of theme and style and higher attaining pupils presented sensitive responses through their own poems. Learning is effective in lessons where teachers ensure that pupils remain actively involved through series of interesting and appropriate activities. For example, in a Key Stage 3 class, where pupils are engaged in a wide range of practical activities based on a play they have studied. These activities include individual and group work, with pupils using the internet for their research, writing newspaper reports in the style of the time, preparing radio scripts, drawing maps and producing appropriate artefacts. In another lesson, pupils revise a book by creating a snakes and ladders game, placing the positive and negative features affecting the progress of the main character within the context of the plot. Most lessons are well planned; teachers define clearly the learning objectives as the lesson proceeds enabling pupils to understand what they are doing, how well they have done and how they can improve.
- 107 Less satisfactory are lessons where learning objectives are too general and as a consequence learning outcomes are restricted. In some classes, there is a wide range of ability and teachers do not always cater appropriately for the full range. For example by failing to provide structured support, such as writing frames or by failing to adequately match activities to the capabilities of all the pupils in the class.

- 108 Most pupils' good behaviour and positive attitudes to work contribute to their good progress. They are well motivated, work enthusiastically and rise to the challenges set by their teachers. Pupils cooperate well in group and paired activities and enter fully into class discussion. An example of pupils' mature attitude to learning is their responsible use of the information technology facilities in the computer room.
- 109 The curriculum meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. Although it is generally broad and balanced a consequence of not having a scheme of work for pupils in Key Stage 3 is the inconsistent delivery of the curriculum, for example in the teaching of basic skills. The curriculum has gaps. There is little evidence of drama and there is not an effective guided reading programme. The department is successfully integrating the use of information and computer technology into classroom teaching. Homework is set and marked regularly and is a valuable extension of the curriculum. Provision for extra curricular activities is satisfactory. There are visits to the theatre and visitors bring theatre to the school. There is a drama club and an annual school production.
- 110 The timetable arrangements create inequality of opportunity, with some pupils able to move from set to set whilst others cannot.
- 111 There is good provision for pupils' personal development. Teachers are prepared to confront social and moral issues as they arise, for example to discuss strategies for coping with bullying or consider the racial issues from the book 'To Kill a Mockingbird'. Teachers are sensitive to pupils' personal response to poetry and provide time for reflection. The cultural dimension of pupils' lives is enhanced by theatre visits, the drama productions and the extensive literature studied throughout the three key stages. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural dimensions of personal development are further enhanced by the well - presented displays in classrooms and throughout the English area. A particularly strong feature is pupils' poetry writing.
- 112 The department is well organised. There are sufficient well-qualified and experienced teachers to deliver the curriculum and learning resources are good. Accommodation is satisfactory although some classes are scattered around the school. The department has made good progress in developing procedures, which accurately predict future performance and enable teachers to set targets. The missing element of assessment is related to the learning objectives in a scheme of work and is the detailed identification of individual and group needs to inform lesson planning. The department has adequate procedures for monitoring pupils' work but the current provision for monitoring teaching is inadequate.

Media Studies

- 113 This report is drawn from a small sample of lessons, a scrutiny of students' work and discussions with them. Media studies is taught in the Sixth Form only and students were entered for the GCE Advanced Level examination for the first time in 1999.
- 114 In the 1999 GCE Advanced Level examination, the pass rate was over 90 per cent, which is in line with the national average. The percentage of students achieving the higher A and B grades was below the national average. Students make good progress throughout Year 12 developing and exploring concepts new to them and very good progress in Year 13. By the end of the key stage attainment is above the national expectation.

- 115 The quality of teaching is good. Lessons are well planned and students are aware of their learning objectives. Teachers have a good command of the subject and create positive relationships that provide students with the confidence to explore new ideas, for example, in a Year 12 class students explored the conventions of news broadcasting. In a Year 13 class, students are preparing their final assignments and they bring good previous knowledge to a wide range of practical work and independent research. For example, students are engaged in filming, producing radio broadcasts, creating advertisements and exploring aspects of genre in films. Good use is made of the information and computer technology facilities.
- 116 Students enjoy media studies, are well motivated and work very hard. Written work is extensive and well-researched. Students are supportive of each other in group activities and their positive attitudes and high level of commitment enhance their progress and attainment.
- 117 The curriculum follows the GCE Advanced Level syllabus and meets its requirements. There are inadequate facilities to meet fully all the practical options and these constrain the further development of the subject. For example, there are no discrete rooms for teaching media studies and studio facilities and cutting and editing facilities are limited. There is a teacher in charge of media studies within the English faculty and the subject is well organised. Teachers follow the GCE Advanced Level syllabus and its assessment requirements. A weakness in the organisation of the subject is the lack of a scheme of work with clearly identified learning objectives and a pattern of assessment based on them.

MATHEMATICS

- 118 Last year, at the end of Key Stage 3, pupils' attainment in the national tests was well above the national average, and broadly similar to standards achieved by pupils in similar schools. Boys' results over the past three years in the national tests have been consistently higher than the girls' results. The trend in pupil achievement in the national tests has risen at a faster rate than it has done nationally. The mathematics results when compared with similar schools were better than science but weaker than English and could improve further.
- 119 Last year, pupils' GCSE achievements in mathematics were well above national averages in the proportion attaining the higher grades of A* to C. The trends in pupils achieving grades A* to C in the past three years has been faster than nationally, except for one year, 1998. This was an unusual year when fewer higher attaining pupils attended the school. In the top set in Year 11 all the pupils sat their GCSE two terms early, and most pupils achieved a grade A* or A.
- 120 Pupils' results in Advanced Level mathematics are broadly in line with national average although results have deteriorated in recent years.
- 121 Overall pupils make good progress at Key Stage 3. The attainment of pupils entering the school at the start of Year 7 is generally above the national average. By the end of Year 9 they are achieving high levels of attainment. In Key Stage 4 pupils also make good progress, with almost every pupil achieving a grade in their GCSE. This is a good result for all the pupils. In the sixth form students' progress is about in line with what is expected for students starting Advanced Level with the grades they have.
- 122 Standards seen in lessons and in work scrutiny shows that overall the standard of

pupils' work is above that seen for pupils of a similar age although in the lower band classes in Years 7 and 8, pupils are insufficiently challenged. In number and algebra, by Year 9, lower attaining pupils are able to work with sequences of number to find the generalised term. They can add and multiply decimal numbers, and use percentages to work out the depreciation on a car. Higher attaining pupils have a good understanding of number and algebra. They are able to simplify quadratic equations, substitute into equations, factorise an equation and expand brackets. Pupils know the difference between two squares and work confidently with quadratic inequalities. Towards the end of Key Stage 4, higher attaining pupils understand and use rational and irrational numbers. They find the gradient of a curve by drawing the tangent to the curve. They use sine and cosine trigonometrical ratios to find unknown sides of a right-angled triangle. Lower attaining pupils can draw graphs of straight-line graphs and simple quadratics. They also investigate a range of mobile telephone schemes and reason out which is the most suitable one to buy for different people.

- 123 By Year 9, in shape and space, the lower attaining pupils are able to find the circumference of a circle and the area of a circle and are able to calculate the area of an irregular shape. They know the volume of a cube or a cuboid, and can draw the nets of them. Higher attaining pupils can find the surface area and volumes of shapes such as a pyramid, a cone, a cylinder, and a triangular prism and can make nets of three-dimensional shapes. Towards the end of Key Stage 4 higher attainers understand the range of transformations on a shape including stretches. The lower attainers are able to rotate, reflect, enlarge and translate shapes.
- 124 By Year 9, in data handling, the lower attaining pupils can draw bar charts; pie charts and can calculate averages such as mean and mode. Higher attaining pupils can combine probabilities; draw tree diagrams, and can work out the line of best fit. Towards the end of Key Stage 4, higher attainers use the methods for calculating the probabilities of a compound event. Lower attainers use frequency tables, block charts and pie charts to illustrate data that they have collected.
- 125 There are a few good examples of where numeracy is supporting pupils in other areas of the curriculum. However, there is no whole-school numeracy policy and this is an area for development. In economics in Year 11 pupils interpret graphs well. In science higher attaining pupils use their skills in numeracy to support their work in physics. In most Key Stage 4 work in science pupils can handle number effectively to support their work in GCSE. Students in the sixth form cope effectively with number, particularly in physics.
- 126 Pupils are using information technology to support their work in geometrical transformations and using spreadsheets, having created their own databases, in both key stages. The revision of the schemes of work in Key Stage 4 is planned to include more elements of information and communication technology.
- 127 Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in mathematics lessons are usually very good and this supports their learning well. In many of the lessons pupils come into the lesson quietly, and are well behaved throughout the lesson. However, in a few classes seen the behaviour was unsatisfactory and in these classes pupils' learning was disrupted. In one lesson some of the pupils were particularly upset at the others' behaviour. Sometimes pupils show little interest in their work.
- 128 Pupils with special educational needs who receive a learning support assistant make better progress than many of the other pupils in the class, as with that help they are

able to stay focused throughout the lesson. However, those who do not get help will sometimes be disruptive.

- 129 The quality of teaching overall is at least satisfactory, although in Key Stage 3, it is unsatisfactory. However, in Key Stages 4 and the sixth form more than two in every three lessons seen were good or very good. In Key Stage 3 almost half the lessons were good or better, and one lesson was excellent. However, almost a quarter was unsatisfactory. In many lessons teachers go through the teaching points carefully to ensure that pupils understand the work well. Teachers use effective questioning techniques to keep pupils thinking throughout the session. Many of the teachers have very good classroom control and coupled with a good fast pace of work, pupils learn quickly. In a number of lessons the homework set consolidates the work learnt in lessons well.
- 130 However, there are weaknesses when the teacher does not put over the teaching points clearly or does so inaccurately. Sometimes the teacher is unable to keep the class quiet enough so that learning can take place. Some teachers allow pupils to call out answers, which has the effect of stopping other pupils having enough thinking time to answer. Some teachers do not set sufficiently challenging work for the range of pupils in their classes. In particular in the lower band classes in Years 7 and 8, where there is a wide range of attainment, the work is not always appropriate and pupils underachieve in relation to their ability. Teachers' records of pupils' progress are inconsistent across the department. Some teachers' records are good. However, many are not linked to attainment targets or to the level that pupils are working on and are not helpful for monitoring pupils' progress.
- 131 The previous report made a number of recommendations for action. The department has introduced changes to implement some of these but a more rigorous approach to change is needed. There are now additional meetings for inset and moderation. The department is also using information technology with whole classes.
- 132 There has been sound improvement in the subject since the last inspection. However, there is still insufficient monitoring of teaching to ensure consistency across the department, particularly with regard to the quality of teaching and teachers' records. There is also insufficient monitoring of pupils' progress, particularly those pupils who sat the GCSE two terms early, as some of these pupils did not achieve a grade A* or A, which is what is expected of pupils in the top set. The department development plan is not costed for each item and there are no success criteria. There is a need for a proper plan, which annually examines current performance and plans for change. The issue of the wide range of attainment in the quite large lower band classes in Years 7 and 8 needs to be reconsidered.

SCIENCE

- 133 Pupils achieve well and standards are well above average at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4 and above average for students at the end of Advanced Level courses.
- 134 In 1999 pupils' results in National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 were well above national averages for the percent achieving Levels 5, 6 and above. Analysis of pupils' written work and lesson observation confirm this is still the case. Overall results for both boys and girls exceed national averages, though boys attain significantly higher results than girls. There is room for further improvement. The percent of pupils attaining Level 5 and above has fallen significantly over the last three years, for example from 86 per cent in 1998 to 70 per cent in 1999. The percentage attaining Level 5 and above in 1999 is well below the average for similar schools. Results for the same pupils in 1999 were significantly higher in English and mathematics. This is a cause for concern.
- 135 Progress of pupils in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory overall. Pupils enter the school with a mostly secure basis for further learning of science. The work provided during Year 7 and throughout the key stage efficiently reinforces and extends existing knowledge, and secures steady improvement in understanding for most pupils in all the elements of National Curriculum science, broadly life processes, materials, physical processes and scientific investigation. Although the majority of pupils make good progress, that of lower attainers is unsatisfactory because key ideas are not explained well enough nor do teachers check that pupils have understood before rushing on to the next topic. Teachers do not always support pupils' literacy as some marking is too cursory and pupils are unclear about how to improve. At other times, teachers allow too much rude and off-task behaviour so that learning is impaired. Progress for average attaining pupils is sometimes excellent, such as a class who were guided very precisely through a complex investigation so that they understood how to prove that enzymes break up starch, and how to describe this scientifically. The school is especially successful in securing good and very good progress for high-attaining pupils so that significant numbers achieve the highest levels available for their age but the teaching styles adopted for lower attainers are not enabling them to make adequate progress.
- 136 By the end of Key Stage 4, GCSE results are well above the national average. The results for physics, chemistry and biology, taken as separate subjects are very high, usually 100% A*-C over the previous three years. These results are for about 20 pupils, all high-attainers, who work very hard and very effectively. The results for Single Award GCSE, mostly weaker students, are also above national averages, usually with 25 per cent of a cohort of around 50 pupils attaining A*-C grades. The school succeeds in ensuring the most-able achieve the highest levels, and that almost all weaker students attain above grade G [the lowest] and that none fail. This strength has been secured consistently over the last three years. The weakness in attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is that most pupils enter Double Award GCSE but the percent attaining A*-C grades has fallen significantly over the previous three years from 86 per cent in 1997 to 71 per cent in 1999 although overall results are still well above national averages, and the average points score for Double Award GCSE is reasonably stable. Analysis of pupils' written work and lesson observation show that Double Award GCSE attainment is not yet back to the highest levels of two years ago. Pupils of all abilities progress well during Key Stage 4 because teachers are more effective and consistent at this key stage although teaching needs to be adapted to meet the needs of the average pupil to improve the overall grades.

- 137 Recent results at Advanced Level are good with an above average proportion of A-B grades and good average point scores. The most recent results show an improvement on the previous year. The evidence from the inspection shows that these standards are being maintained.
- 138 The current situation is better than that reported in the previous inspection in some matters, such as the use of information technology and the provision for pupils with special educational needs. Teaching is more consistent, and the staff team now works together more effectively. Accommodation is still unsatisfactory and this factor is still impairing standards. Results at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 had improved since the previous inspection but then fell. Advanced Level results are better.
- 139 Teaching is good overall. The key strength is teachers' subject expertise that they impart well. Lesson objectives are usually made clear to all in the class. Teaching often challenges and inspires high-attaining pupils who work hard. Time, support staff and information technology resources are used well. Feedback in lessons is mostly adequate and often very good although marking does not consistently support this. Useful and regular homework is set. Learning is especially effective with the sixth form who quickly adapt to the rigour and detail of advanced work and make rapid progress using suitably analytic and questioning approaches. Learning in Key Stage 4 is effective for all abilities. A lower set started a lesson with little spark but, with careful teaching, gradually improved as they began to grasp the points being made. They could identify errors and used the teacher and the text sensibly. The work with the highest attaining pupils in Year 11 shares the strengths found in the sixth form. However, even middle sets learn well. For example, Year 11 studying metals shared the enthusiasm and interest of the teacher, and covered a lot of ground, mostly independently. Potentially disruptive pupils were managed very well so that they worked hard and carried out all the required tasks. Some Key Stage 3 teaching is unsatisfactory, yet much is good even excellent. For example, a top set in Year 9 coped confidently with a heavy work load pitched at a high level whereas the teaching of lower sets is not always matched to their needs.
- 140 The science curriculum is well balanced, and is enhanced by competitions and plenty of opportunities for revision and support. Science is managed effectively, helped by the use of the comprehensive faculty handbook. The staff team work efficiently, for example, they have sensible strategies to tackle the falling trends in results for Key Stage 3 and for Double Award GCSE. Assessment systems are good and are used well to guide pupils into Key Stage 4 GCSE groups, or to advise pupils as they seek to study Advanced Level. There is insufficient systematic evaluation of strengths and weaknesses in teaching, such as the impact on learning of the banding in Key Stage 3. At present improvement strategies are planned for only one year ahead.

ART

- 141 Whilst there is no data available to establish attainment on entry, standards for many at Key Stage 3 are in line with national expectations in both attainment targets, with a significant proportion achieving standards beyond this level. End of key stage school assessments are broadly in line with this judgement.
- 142 Attainment by the end of Key Stage 4 is high and maintains the standards of the past four years. The number of pupils achieving A*-C grades in 1999 very significantly exceeds national expectations. Attainment at Post-16 continues to exceed national expectations. Standards in art overall show the highest levels of performance when

compared with all other subjects.

- 143 By the end of Key Stage 3 many pupils demonstrate a sound knowledge and understanding of technical vocabulary and a good range of drawing and painting skills. Their work is based on research and experimentation with regular homework that supports development and encourages individuality. Higher attaining pupils produce strongly drawn and well finished work. Work inspired by Aboriginal art forms and large scale studies of cones and cylinders were good examples. The work of lower attainers is sometimes unfinished and lacks care.
- 144 The present time allocation, a reduction from last year, is an obvious constraint, and an additional reason for the department to consider the appropriateness of pace in a few lessons.
- 145 By the end of Key Stage 4 higher attaining pupils have developed impressive drawing skills, and their finished pieces are developed to high standards of artistic competency and originality. Research is often extensive and wide ranging. Their knowledge of artists and art movements is broad and is influential in their work. Pupils are encouraged to work independently and to pursue individuality.
- 146 Compositions inspired by a visit to the Tate Gallery, and the work on Movement, Motion and Dynamism, as well as the textile printing are good examples.
- 147 The finished work of lower attainers shows less attention to detail and is more limited in research and enquiry. However, pupils with special needs are well integrated, generally well supported and make progress.
- 148 The standard of learning in the sixth form is good, often very good. Work in a wide variety of media is the result of extensive and analytical research. Students demonstrate high levels of artistic competency as well as an increased capacity for independent learning and experimentation in pursuit of originality. Observational drawing is particularly strong at this stage, with large scale work resulting from a range of artistic and environmental stimuli. The landing and playground murals are ambitious and impressive achievements. Much of the work is highly imaginative. Students take much pride in their work, are very motivated and informed by the work of famous artists. This is particularly true of the GNVQ course. Their learning environment is a vibrant, fertile, stimulating and very productive area where success is celebrated, shared and infectious.
- 149 Numerous changes to departmental practice have been made since the last inspection. Opportunities for individual creativity are much increased and experimentation with three dimensional work is more abundant. Written work increases significantly as pupils move through the key stages, and in addition to historical studies, also includes vocabulary notes and self evaluation on work completed. Whilst homework and coursework are regularly marked, very little is done at present in Key Stages 3 and 4 to assist pupils with the improvement of their spelling and punctuation. Opportunities now available in the use of computer technology as part of the taught courses in Year 9 and Post-16 need to be extended to other year groups.
- 150 The quality of teaching at Key Stage 3 and 4 is good and in the sixth form is very good, occasionally inspirational. Teachers have a good subject knowledge that they generally relate well to pupils' needs. The range of teaching strategies used has a

positive impact on the quality of teaching. Learning outcomes were most successful in those classes where expectations were high in terms of quality, output and pace of work. On a few occasions, pace was comfortable rather than challenging, and deadlines were not always clear. The use of assessment to inform teaching, with regular informative and diagnostic marking, as well as target setting and individual action plans at Key Stage 4 and Post-16, are effective and contribute to the very good examination results. Assessment data is not however used to inform curriculum planning. The end of lesson review, identifying strengths and weaknesses, could be used more effectively.

- 151 Pupils' behaviour and their attitude to work are good, and very good in the sixth form. Many pupils are enthusiastic about their work. They settle quickly and many work with determination and remain focused in their work. They are keen and interested. They co-operate well in joint ventures.
- 152 They express pride in their own achievement and take an interest in the work of others. This is particularly marked in the GNVQ course. The department does much to extend the spiritual dimension of personal development through discussions on artists and art movements, and the wide ranging extra curricular opportunities on offer. Opportunities for reflection, however, could be extended in class.
- 153 The department is efficiently managed. It is well led by an enthusiastic, experienced, sensitive and hard working specialist who has the vision and the commitment to achieve and maintain high standards. Teaching and learning outcomes are monitored through class visits and the moderation of work. Art education is provided by a strong team to which the technician also makes a valuable contribution. A Development Plan exists in outline form, but this needs more detailed discussion at departmental level.
- 154 Accommodation and resources are adequate and well used although little appears to have been done to improve its condition since the last inspection.
- 155 A vibrant and stimulating work environment has been established in which creative thinking and high levels of achievement can flourish. Very impressive displays of work cover the walls of the department and the public areas of the school.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

- 156 The percentage of pupils achieving grades A*-C in the subjects of Food Technology, Graphical Communications and Resistant Materials combined is above the national average. The percentage of pupils who passed in the range A*-G is also above the national average for similar schools. There is an upward trend. Results in this subject are better than the average for the school. Within this result pupils are achieving well above the national average in Food Technology and Graphical Communications.
- 157 Students studying Design and Communication at Advanced Level are working to standards above course expectations. In 1999 all the students obtained a pass grade. This is above the national average. The standard of their work is good.

- 158 In teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 (1999) pupils achieved standards in the combined subject of design and technology which are above national expectations. From the evidence of the inspection at the end of Key Stage 4 the majority of pupils achieve a standard of work which is above national expectations. Standards in food technology and graphical communications are well above national expectations. The standard of work is above national expectations at Key Stage 3. There is no significant difference in the standards of work of boys and girls.
- 159 In Year 9 pupils successfully design and make a 3 dimensional model of an animal complete with a presentation box. They work from scaled plans and a construction schedule modifying them should difficulties arise. In Year 11 pupils understand that modern food technology has provided a wide range of food products. They know how labelling assists the discerning customer in their choice of food products. They can interpret food labels to recognise nutritional values, sugar content, colours, preservatives, antioxidants and other additives.
- 160 The quality of learning is good and pupils make good progress with their studies throughout the school. This is a consequence of good quality teaching and a good scheme of work at Key Stage 3 that ensures a wide range of learning experiences matched to the National Curriculum. The scheme of work includes electronics. Textile technology is also taught at Key Stage 3 and this subject makes a significant contribution to the good quality of learning. This has resulted in a further improvement in standards and the quality of learning since the last inspection. In particular the progress of pupils is consistent as they move through the different aspects of the subject.
- 161 All pupils make good progress when developing their skills in using tools and equipment with increasing precision. They successfully advance their skills in designing and evaluating the things they have made taking into consideration the views and preferences of the users of their products. The quality of learning is very good when pupils are learning graphics. Enthusiastic teaching, good support and high expectations for originality give rise to high quality modelling, drawings, plans and written work reflecting the pupils creative effort. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. This is because they receive good support and individual attention from their teachers when engaged on individual tasks.
- 162 In the majority of lessons pupils have a positive attitude to their work. Many are enthusiastic and they clearly enjoy their studies. They take pride in the quality of their practical and written work. In all classes pupils co-operate, sharing and using equipment sensibly and safely. Pupils are keen to demonstrate and explain the things that they have designed and made.
- 163 At both key stages the quality of teaching is good and at times it is very good. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject. They organise their pupils and manage practical work to good standards. When teaching is good or very good, teachers set high expectations for learning to which their pupils readily respond. They support and encourage pupils of all abilities enabling them to experience success. Good teaching took place in Year 10 when pupils were learning about oils and fats. The teacher set high expectations for the level of understanding expected of the pupils. This included knowing the difference in the physiology of oily and white fish, saturated and unsaturated fats and hydrogenated oils. Very good questioning reinforced previous learning and initiated further thinking. The pupils maintained their

concentration and asked thoughtful questions.

- 164 At Key Stage 3 there is a well thought out scheme of work. This provides a range of learning experiences designed to challenge high attaining pupils and to support pupils with special educational needs. Approximately 50% of the pupils at Key Stage 4 are unable to study this subject. For these pupils statutory requirements are not met. The pupils' standard of literacy is developed through the use of appropriate technical language. At times opportunities are missed to encourage pupils to use fuller and more accurate explanations. Some pupils use information and communications technology (ICT) for the presentation of their written work. A trip to Legoland and other out of school activities allow pupils to experience and enjoy the technological influences around them. This brings further interest to their learning. The staff work well as a team to ensure continuity in pupils' learning. They know their pupils well. Procedures for assessing pupils' work are good. Their attainment is carefully monitored and recorded as they progress from year to year. Homework is set regularly and the assignments are often discussed with the class in advance.
- 165 An experienced, knowledgeable and enthusiastic leader manages the subject to a good standard. A new technician has yet to be appointed. Currently this has a direct impact on the quality of learning. Saws and planes are blunt and pupils are unable to use some equipment for example, the sander through lack of maintenance and safety checks.
- 166 There is a further improved scheme of work and pupils are now achieving standards that are above national expectations throughout the school. There is continuity in the quality of learning. The Advanced Level course in design and communication has achieved further success. Currently statutory requirements are not met for approximately 50% of the pupils at Key Stage 4.

GEOGRAPHY

- 167 Standards are good in all key stages and most pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve well from their attainment on entry. However, the achievement of the most able pupils does not fully match their capabilities. Overall results in the GCSE examination at the end of Key Stage 4 were above the national average in 1999, with well above the national average of pupils achieving higher grades, although none reaching the very highest. Although there was a marked dip in A*-C grades in 1998, there is a general trend of significant improvement during the last three years in all but the highest grade and 100 per cent of pupils consistently reach a pass grade, in the A*-G range. The standards of both boys and girls are above national averages. The GCSE results of pupils taking geography in the school are slightly below their average for all subjects, but by an amount that almost exactly matches the national situation. Standards at Advanced Level are above national averages and have been consistently so in recent years, with 100 per cent of pupils achieving a pass grade each year.
- 168 In lessons and work seen, standards are above national averages in both key stages and the sixth form. At the end of Key Stage 3 pupils know about a range of places and geographical themes. They can read and analyse maps and translate information into other forms, when for example they interpret contour lines on a map, to create a cross section diagram showing the relief of a locality in southern Italy. Although pupils generally have command of a good range of specialist terms, skills in developing structured extended writing are less well developed. There is good

understanding of such factors as the effects of physical characteristics of southern Italy on the patterns of land use and employment there and the relationship between this locality and the rest of the country. However, while these relationships are identified well in written work, they are seldom fully explained. Pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 know about and understand the distinction between local, national and global scales when considering the location of industries and new towns and are able to balance advantages and disadvantages of particular locations. Most understand such geographical relationships as that between gross national product and the percentage employed in primary industries and can express these in such graphical forms as pie charts. However, while these are included in work, they are often not referred to adequately in the text. Pupils in Year 13 have a good knowledge of such advanced themes as the hierarchy of settlement, models of urban structure and the effects of government policy on human geography. They have a well developed specialist vocabulary, which many use to enhance the quality of reports by, for example clearly distinguishing between various types of volcanic formation and identifying examples of where these exist. Reports of fieldwork carried out on the Isle of Arran are well structured, although some pupils fail to fully explain their methods of enquiry and sampling techniques.

- 169 Attitudes to learning are good in all key stages. Most pupils focus well on their work and are willing to give and receive help from each other and their teachers. They respond well to questioning, although they do not often discuss matters at length. However, pupils ask teachers thoughtful questions in some lessons in Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form. There is off-task conversation in some lessons, although pupils generally respond well to teachers when corrected.
- 170 The quality of teaching is good in all key stages. It is never less than satisfactory and is sometimes very good. Management of classes is good, with time being well used and good behaviour and attitudes to work strongly promoted, so that fruitful learning always takes place. Lessons are well planned, with clear objectives that are fully shared with pupils and good links are made with previous learning, to enhance pupils' understanding of the relationship between current and prior learning. Teachers' good subject knowledge is often applied well in good, clear explanations and in providing a balance of closed and open questions, that encourage pupils to apply their developing knowledge in an exploratory way. However, although teachers respond well to these contributions by sympathetically correcting misconceptions and referring to interesting examples to demonstrate points made by pupils, they are usually satisfied with short responses and do not often initiate more sustained discussion in which pupils might for example develop their own examples, or criticise each others' responses. There is generally a good mix of activities, although few opportunities for group work. Teachers succeed well in making tasks manageable for all and this has been supported by the purchase of resources for teaching at a foundation level. However, this leads to low challenge in written work in some lessons in Key Stage 3, especially for the more able pupils and lack of opportunities to develop skills in structured, extended writing, utilising such strategies as writing frames. Some contribution to the development of literacy skills is made when teachers focus well on the need to develop a specialist vocabulary and some aspects of numeracy are supported well, when for example pupils work with scales in mapping exercises. However, there is a need for a more systematic planning of the contribution of the subject to these key skills and to Information Communications Technology capability, as, although there is some use of computers, this is not yet well established. Although some teachers mark well, the general level in Key Stage 3 is poor, being irregular and cursory in some classes, so that it is not helpful to pupils as a guide to

future improvement.

- 171 Arrangements for the leadership and management of the subject are unsatisfactory. Since the promotion of the former head of department, the school has not identified a geography specialist with clear, overall responsibility for the subject. Geography is now managed within the humanities faculty, with various aspects distributed between the head of faculty, who is a history specialist and those who teach the subject. While these arrangements and the hard work of those involved secure the administrative aspects, they do not ensure a clear educational direction for the subject or maintenance of current high standards.
- 172 Since the last inspection, the already good standards in GCSE have further improved and those at Advanced Level have been maintained. There has also been a significant improvement in the availability and quality of textbooks at Key Stage 4. However, there are a number of aspects in which further improvement is still necessary. Although time allocated to the subject in Key Stage 3 has been increased, arrangements are unsatisfactory in Year 8, where there is insufficient time to teach to the required depth. There has been some development of fieldwork opportunities, but these remain limited. The need to improve assessment at Key Stage 3 remains, so that it relates more clearly to National Curriculum levels and is accurate and consistent across the department.

HISTORY

- 173 Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are above the national average shown by the proportion of pupils reaching level 5 and above in teacher assessments in 1999. Standards have been consistently at this level for the last three years. Boys do significantly better than their age group nationally and in 1999 achieved as well as the girls. At the end of Key Stage 4, the proportion of pupils attaining A*-C and A*-G grades at GCSE in 1999 was in line with the national average. There has been a marked downward trend in the higher grades since 1997, when they were well above the national average and higher than at the previous inspection. Boys have consistently done much better than those nationally and in 1999 did significantly better than the girls. Girls achieved well below the national average and their normal standard of the last four years. They do less well in history than in most of their other subjects. Standards are much higher in Years 12 and 13. The proportion attaining A-B grades and also A-E grades in GCE Advanced level in 1999 was well above the national average. Standards have significantly improved since the last inspection and have been consistently high in the last four years. The performance of boys has markedly improved over the last three years and they now achieve significantly better than girls at the higher grades, although the number of entries in 1999 was small.
- 174 In work seen during the inspection, standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are above average. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Compared with the pupils' attainment on entry to the school, the level of achievement is good by the age of 14. Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of the key characteristics of the subject and of chronology. Nearly all can effectively select and record information from written and pictorial sources as they have at least competent note-making skills. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs are now being increasingly supported in this with appropriate materials. Most pupils have a good understanding of causes, though they are less sure how to prioritise and evaluate them, for instance in examining long and short term causes of the First World War in Year 9. The increased use of group work enables nearly all pupils to be at least

competent in expressing themselves orally, with higher attaining pupils speaking confidently and fluently. This had been considered a weakness in the last inspection. Pupils are given the opportunities to use their writing skills in various forms. Middle and higher attaining pupils in Year 9 produce good extended writing with strong empathy and analysis on factory conditions in the 19th. Century and have well developed skills of interpretation. However, the ability of Year 8 pupils of similar attainment to evaluate sources for usefulness and reliability and to do thorough research is less well developed. This is partly due to limited opportunities as the time allocation in Year 8 is half the recommended amount nor do they have the opportunity to develop the use of information technology as an information source and as a way of organising their enquiry work as access to computers is restricted and their use is not written into the schemes of work.

- 175 In work seen, the attainment of pupils currently at the end of Key Stage 4 is above the national average. This is better than the latest GCSE results. It is much attributable to the reinforcement of the pupils' knowledge and understanding through more active participation and frequent testing. The level of achievement of the boys is satisfactory by the end of Year 11. However, although the achievement of the girls is less satisfactory in examinations the work seen was satisfactory. Nearly all pupils have good historical knowledge, make notes well from a variety of sources and can make accurate deductions from these. Most pupils have a broad understanding of change and continuity and good skills of research and organisation, as seen in their coursework on Vietnam. They have a firmer understanding of causation than at Key Stage 3 and can prioritise causes, as when Year 10 pupils effectively discussed in groups the reasons for the American Depression of the 1930's. Higher attaining pupils produce good extended writing with accurate analysis and empathy, though some have technical deficiencies in their literacy. Writing at length is competently done by middle and lower attaining pupils, but their skills of interpreting sources for usefulness and reliability are less well developed. Pupils with special educational needs find extended writing difficult without the aid of resources, such as writing frames, to support them.
- 176 The level of attainment in work seen in the current Year 13 is in line with the national average. Compared with their prior attainment, achievement is satisfactory. Students make further progress in note making and source handling skills. The good literacy skills of the best students lead to well expressed and coherently written essay work. These skills are less developed in lower attaining students. Most students articulate views clearly, though few can do so analytically or with the confidence to challenge each other. This is partly due to limited opportunities for lively group or class discussion and an over-dependence on the teacher. Standards are higher in Year 12, where students display sharper critical analysis, wider reading and an awareness of the views of established historians, as for example in their examination of the different interpretations of the Holocaust.
- 177 Pupils' attitudes to work are nearly always good, often very good and never less than satisfactory. They are best at Key Stage 4 where in two-thirds of the lessons they are very good. Pupils settle quickly to tasks, listen attentively to the teacher and nearly all concentrate for the whole lesson. The regular use of lively, well-controlled group and role plays has also encouraged them to communicate well, to respect each other's views and to work well collaboratively. Year 7 pupils effectively and enthusiastically enacted the reasons for Henry II's quarrel with Becket, while Year 10 pupils successfully discussed the relative importance of the reasons for the American Depression. This is a strength and clearly reflects their willingness to take

responsibility, to participate and show initiative, weaknesses highlighted in the last inspection. Pupils with special educational needs also respond well to the increased opportunities now given for active, independent work as they are being increasingly well-provided with materials suited to their needs. Most pupils take care over their work and do their homework regularly. The more active and constructive involvement pupils now experience in history, make it a popular subject at Key Stage 4 with a consistently high uptake in the Sixth Form.

- 178 The quality of teaching seen was good overall with examples of very good practice. It is best at Key Stage 4 where it is all good or very good. Teaching is now more consistent than at the time of the last inspection. This improvement is largely due to the increased range of activities that involve pupils far more actively, especially in developing their confidence and oral skills. Teachers have good subject knowledge, plan their lessons well and set appropriate learning objectives, which are clearly explained to the pupils, although not always reviewed at the end of the lesson. More resources are now available to meet the needs of all levels of attainment, criticised in the last inspection. Pupils are managed well, relationships are very good based on mutual respect and high standards of behaviour are expected and set. This creates a good working atmosphere in the classroom and leads to mostly effective learning at all key stages. The progress pupils made in their learning was good or better in nearly two-thirds of the lessons. It was never less than satisfactory and best at Key Stage 4.
- 179 However, some inconsistency in teaching standards still exists. There is not consistent matching of materials to the needs of lower attaining pupils, especially in providing more stepped guidance with lengthier research tasks and with writing. Learning is less effective when inappropriate methods are used, for instance, too much teacher exposition and inadequate opportunities for active involvement in the Sixth Form and failure to challenge higher attaining pupils with searching, supplementary questions. There are also weaknesses in assessment. Marking is done regularly and is generally encouraging, but below the Sixth Form, there is often a lack of rigour in correcting weaknesses in literacy and style and even some historical inaccuracies. Suggestion for improvement and target setting of history skills are also often lacking at Key Stage 3. Assessment procedures at Key Stage 3 are very undeveloped. Assessment tasks are not identified in the schemes of work and the Key Elements and skills are not being progressively assessed. Nor are the formative tests of knowledge being moderated to National Curriculum levels before Year 9 or centrally recorded to track pupils' progress. Annual reports are not sufficiently subject-specific to guide pupils on their progress and to inform them constructively of areas to be improved. Assessment procedures are better at Key Stage 4 and are good in the Sixth Form and are helping to both set targets and monitor pupils' progress. However, the department still needs to analyse the exam results more critically and respond to the issue of significant gender imbalance at these key stages.
- 180 There have been a number of significant improvements since the last inspection. Standards at Key Stage 3 have improved, largely as a result of more varied teaching strategies that have raised oral skills to the level of the good written skills and prompted a more enthusiastic response from pupils. There are now more opportunities for pupils to express their own ideas through more active learning. More materials are now available to meet the needs of all pupils. The time allocated to the subject at Key Stage 3 has been increased, although the limited time in Year 8 is constraining progress in developing history skills. However, a tighter and more

systematic monitoring and evaluation of teaching will enhance these improvements. This will help to ensure that the informal sharing of good practice within the department results in a consistent raising of standards of learning in the classroom

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

- 181 In teacher assessments (1999) pupils' attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above the national average. There is no significance between the attainment of boys and girls. From the evidence of the inspection the standard of pupils work is good in Years 7-9. However these standards are not maintained in Year 10 and Year 11. Attainment is below that which can be expected for the majority of pupils at Key Stage 4. Pupils are not able to take any formal qualifications in this subject.
- 182 The majority of the pupils in Year 10 and Year 11 have an insufficient time and range of aspects of ICT included in their studies. Their standard of work is well below national expectations. Pupils taking business studies and economics use ICT as part of their course. They have higher standards in using ICT to handle data. However their standards are still below expectations when related to the national curriculum levels of attainment. The school does not meet National Curriculum requirements for pupils at Key Stage 4.
- 183 In Year 9 pupils can use ICT to organise, refine and present information in different styles for specific audiences. They use a professional presentation application to set out information and graphics in a logical yet creative way to maximise its impact. In Year 11 pupils taking business studies and economics can use ICT to set out text, diagrams and pictures in a creative way to maximise the impact of the information. They can enter data gathered from questionnaires and display the results using graphs.
- 184 At Key Stage 3 the quality of learning is good. These pupils make good progress with their studies. Progress is unsatisfactory at Key Stage 4 for the majority of pupils. Pupils often rely on previously acquired skills to complete their work using ICT within their other subjects. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress when they use ICT to help them improve their skills in literacy and numeracy.
- 185 The quality of learning is good for all pupils in Years 7-9. The quality of learning was particularly high in a Year 8 class when the pupils developed their skills in using desktop publishing to produce a leaflet to advertise an event such as the London Eye. They set out text and graphics showing good creative effort. The quality of learning is unsatisfactory for the majority of older pupils and in particular where they are not studying business studies or economics. In these subjects the more advanced skills of using a spreadsheet for computer modelling are taught.
- 186 For older pupils the curriculum for ICT is taught during lessons in other subjects. For example pupils successfully improved their search skills in English in Year 11 when they used the Internet to download information about a poem from a BBC web-site. When studying mathematics the pupils use a computer to programme procedures to create complex repeating patterns on the screen (logo). At Key Stage 4 they use a spreadsheet application to process and compare data. The quality of learning is good in Year 13 media studies classes when students use the Internet to investigate advertisements with inter-textual references.
- 187 Many pupils enjoy this subject and work for long periods of time sustaining their

concentration on the tasks set for them. These pupils are highly motivated and they can work on their own when required to do so. They are confident in their skills and they are prepared to explore new ideas and work creatively.

- 188 The quality of teaching is good in the Key Stage 3 lessons dedicated to ICT. In particular technical skills are explained well. The teachers have good subject knowledge relevant to the age range of their pupils. The pupils are given a clear understanding of what they are to do and what is expected of them. Appropriate and challenging work is set. The pupils are well supported when they require help and the pace of the lessons is good. A Year 9 class was taught to a very good standard when they were learning how to use a professional presentation application to display their work in the form of "slides" with graphics and animated text designed to capture interest. The lesson was very well planned and delivered. A lively pace captivated and held the interest of all the pupils. No discrete teaching of ICT occurs at Key Stage 4.
- 189 For pupils at Key Stage 3 there is a good scheme of work which ensures good standards. Beyond Year 9 there is not sufficient time for them to develop their skills or to extend their knowledge and understanding in using computer simulation and modelling for problem solving and processing and interpreting information. They do not have sufficient experience of control technology or understand fully the advantages and disadvantages of ICT and its impact on our society. There is variation in the amount and content of the work between groups of pupils.
- 190 Many pupils benefit from the good access to the Internet. This helps them to improve their skills through the exploration of many special educational facilities available on the World Wide Web. The use of e-mail is very underdeveloped. This limits the pupils learning experience, for example in modern foreign languages to communicate with pupils in European schools. In science pupils have the opportunity to see how a computer can be used to directly collect information from experiments through sensors. This data is then processed, compared and displayed. In Years 7-9 pupils are given the opportunity to develop their skills in literacy. Good attention is paid to the pupils' correct use of key words and the accuracy of technical explanations.
- 191 The ICT teachers enable the computer rooms to be available out of lesson times. Many pupils take the opportunity to extend their skills during these times. In particular they can use the special educational Internet facilities for independent research for many of the subjects they study. There are good links with local businesses and visitors to the faculty enable pupils to learn about some commercial applications of this technology. Primary school pupils visit the department where they have the opportunity to see the ICT facilities and try out some of the options on offer.
- 192 Assessment matched to National Curriculum levels of attainment is carried out to a sound standard for pupils at Key Stage 3. Standards of work in ICT are not assessed against National Curriculum levels of achievement. At the end of Key Stage 4 pupils receive no formal recognition of their achievements in this subject. Pupil's progress is not monitored. This means that consistency in pupils' learning cannot be assured. This situation is unsatisfactory and in this essential element there has been no improvement since the last inspection.
- 193 This subject is part of a larger faculty including business studies and design and technology. The faculty leader manages the subject well within the limitations of responsibility assigned to her. However, the leadership and management of the

subject throughout the school are unsatisfactory, as key requirements are not met. There has been a programme of training to update the skills of the staff in using and teaching ICT. A full time network manager makes a valued contribution by keeping the computers running to maximise their use. Significant improvement has been made in the quality of learning at Key Stage 3. The school has the quality of teaching and the resources to extend this subject to meet curriculum requirements

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

- 194 Teacher Assessment at the end of Key Stage 3 is accurate and matches national targets. GCSE results in French have risen significantly over the past three years, as has the number of pupils entered. In 1999, the A*-C pass ratio of 55 per cent compared favourably with the national average of 46 per cent. The performance of boys was particularly impressive in that they out-scored the girls, which is extremely unusual. Their A*-C pass ratio of 60 per cent was not only well in excess of the national average for boys (37 per cent) but well above the overall average. GCSE results in German have held steady at just above national averages, but with a much larger entry of the year group in 1999 (48 per cent) than nationally (23 per cent). Results at Advanced level have been volatile: they were poor in 1997 but they were very good in 1999 from a relatively small entry.
- 195 French is offered throughout the school from Year 7 and German from Year 8. All pupils study both French and German in Years 8 and 9.
- 196 Attainment during classroom observation ranges from well below to well above national expectations, with overall standards being at the national average. Although there are fluctuations, pupils' achievement is generally in line with what is expected of their ability levels and prior attainment.
- 197 At all key stages, listening skills are usually strongly developed especially when teachers make consistent use of the foreign language. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils are able to deal with language at or near normal speed, including material on tape. A sound base of vocabulary and grammatical understanding enables pupils at Key Stage 3 to speak competently, an ability that grows with confidence except where behaviour is poor. At Key Stage 4, pupils who try hard speak well; others, more reticent, make little progress. For most sixth form students, speaking is a strength. The ability to formulate and express ideas cogently and with occasional flair is evident except where lack of confidence limits development.
- 198 Reading skills are sound at all key stages. Writing is generally good throughout with pupils soon able to handle complex language in a range of tenses and a variety of purpose and style. There is little noticeable difference in the attainment of boys and girls, except that boys tend to be more outgoing orally. There is, however, often inconsistency across a key stage and between pupils of similar ability, sometimes considerably so. This is due partly to pupils' attitudes and behaviour, and partly to differing teaching skills.

- 199 On balance, teaching overall is good. In just under half of lessons, teaching is good; in most of the rest, it is satisfactory. In a small number of cases, there is very good teaching at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form, and unsatisfactory teaching at Key Stages 3 and 4. In most lessons, teachers make good use of the foreign language, plan well and teach at a brisk pace. The best lessons are characterised by: a lively approach which stimulates pupils' interest and enjoyment; high expectations and an appropriately demanding challenge; frequent opportunities for pupils to speak the foreign language. Many lessons, however, are too teacher-led; this limits pupils' learning and progress in speaking. In the lessons where teaching is unsatisfactory and in a number of otherwise satisfactory lessons, this is a major factor. Also, English is used to excess and the pace is too slow.
- 200 Pupils' attitudes are, in the great majority of cases, very positive a contributory factor in their learning. A not insignificant minority in Key Stages 3 and 4 show little interest: this hinders progress but is usually overcome by skilful teaching.
- 201 Given that all pupils study both French and German in Years 8 and 9, and that a fair number continue with both at Key Stage 4, it is disappointing that so few continue to study a language in the sixth form and none studies two.
- 202 The quality of departmental management has had a positive effect in raising standards and is well placed to improve the match of materials and tasks to pupils' ability, especially with the lower groups and also to further monitor and support teaching skills, particularly with regard to maximising the use of the foreign language by both teachers and pupils.
- 203 Since the previous inspection, examination results have improved and achievement is better matched to ability levels. There has been some progress with the dissemination of good practice in teaching and with a better match of objectives and resources to pupils' needs. The previous report identified speaking skills as being inadequately developed at Key Stages 3 and 4, although this has improved a little, it remains a major area for development.

MUSIC

- 204 The 1999 G.C.S.E. results for pupils gaining the higher A*-C grades were in line with the national average. They were well above the national average in 1997 and 1998. The one student who took the Advanced Level examination in 1999 received a high grade. No students took the examination in the previous two years.
- 205 At the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is in line with national expectations, but a significant number of pupils attain above national expectations in performing and composing. At the end of Key Stage 4 attainment is above national expectations. There are no students studying Advanced Level music in the current Year 13, but in Year 12 attainment of the single student is in line with course-related expectations. Pupils in both key stages and in the sixth form are achieving as well as could be expected in relation to their age and ability.
- 206 Pupils in Key Stage 3 experience a range of musical activities which develop their confidence in performing and composing and extend their appreciation of music from around the world. For example, in a Year 9 lesson pupils practised playing an Irish jig on tuned instruments. They showed a secure understanding of compound rhythmic

patterns, with many pupils able to sustain their own melodic part whilst a different one was being played. A few pupils began to write their own jig and were able to evaluate their work and to offer ideas for its development. Year 7 pupils used three different rhythmic patterns as a basis for a short group composition. They were able to accurately read the rhythms from notation, to keep a steady pulse whilst playing and to give a fluent performance of their piece. In Key Stage 4 pupils show a good understanding of some of the periods in musical history. In a Year 10 lesson pupils compared the music of the Renaissance period with that of the Baroque. They gave examples of the styles of music written, the types of instruments used and were able to name some of the composers and compositional devices of the periods. They used appropriate musical vocabulary in discussion and showed a good general musical knowledge. The student taking the Advanced Level course correctly identified important features in a keyboard sonata by Clementi and showed skill at transposing a melody at sight.

- 207 Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in relation to their prior attainment. The more musically able pupils make good progress. Since the last inspection the standard of pupils' attainment in Key Stage 3 has improved.
- 208 Pupils in both key stages have good attitudes towards the subject. They are well behaved and co-operate in group tasks. In the sixth form there is a committed and motivated approach to work. Pupils make a valuable contribution to music in assemblies.
- 209 Teaching is good in both key stages and very good in the sixth form. This has a positive impact and results in a good pace of learning in lessons. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and use their own musical skills to aid pupils' understanding. In a G.C.S.E. lesson, good teaching enabled pupils to understand the way different musical features were used in a Schubert song performed by the teacher. Pupils were able to hear the relationship between the voice and the chordal accompaniment. Good attention is given to developing pupils' literacy skills. The teaching of music technology is in the early stages of development. There is some inconsistency in the time allocation for lessons for pupils in Key Stage 3. As a result, teachers have to work hard to ensure that all the requirements of the National Curriculum are covered, particularly in Year 9.
- 210 There is good provision for extra-curricular activities and these involve over 90 pupils. There is a choir, an orchestra, a string group, a flute choir and a sixth form group. Over 200 pupils are involved in performances in the inter-house competitions. Pupils have performed both in and out of school and these occasions increase the opportunity for pupils to develop performing skills. There has been a production of the Sound of Music and pupils have taken part in concerts at Rochester Cathedral and Aylesford Priory. At present rehearsals are taking place for A Century of Arts, which involves music, dance, drama and art. Workshops have been given by African and Indian musicians.
- 211 The subject is well-led and this has a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. The Head of Department is assisted by a supportive colleague. There are good liaison arrangements with the feeder primary schools. Instrumental lessons, given by peripatetic teachers, involve 25 pupils. Although this is a small number, many pupils learn instruments out of school.
- 212 The accommodation is unsatisfactory. The practice rooms are small and have no

soundproofing. One of the teaching rooms lacks sufficient space for instrumental work in lessons. Pupils who use the practice rooms are frequently distracted by the sound from physical education lessons in the gymnasium. The resources are satisfactory and include a range of classroom instruments, ethnic instruments, a computer and software.

- 213 The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- 214 The school has been successful in addressing the weaknesses highlighted in the previous inspection report.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

- 215 The GCSE examination results achieved by a small cohort of pupils in 1999 are significantly below national averages; 14 percent of pupils achieved A* - C grades compared with 49 per cent nationally. However, all pupil achieved A* - G grades. The subject was not open to the full ability range.
- 216 Inspection evidence indicates that the present Year 11 cohort are achieving slightly higher standards than those attained in previous years. A small cohort of pupils will take GCE Advanced Level for the first time in 2000. Pupils in the sixth form successfully follow a recreational curriculum. Pupils attain good standards in inter-school matches and competitions. There are no significant differences in the attainment between boys and girls.
- 217 In the work seen during the inspection, the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 are just below the level expected of pupils of the same age nationally. Pupils have acquired the skills necessary for a number of games and many apply the rules fairly although spatial awareness is less well developed. All pupils understand what happens to the body when they warm up and that stretching before starting physical activity is to minimise injury and maximise performance. In volleyball, pupils understand the importance of using the fingertips and flexed legs in the volley and make use of good footwork in a game. In rugby, the concepts of moving forward when carrying the ball in passing, rucking and mauling are understood. The majority of pupils demonstrate this effectively within a game. Some low attaining pupils playing games have co-ordination problems and at times their timing of passes is ineffective.
- 218 In the work seen during the inspection, the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 are at the level expected of pupils of the same age nationally. The majority of pupils have developed sufficient skill and understanding of rules to be able to obtain a level of satisfaction from taking part in a competitive game. Pupils show an understanding of simple tactics in netball, basketball and football. Lower attaining pupils show that when pressure is placed on their skills in a game the techniques are insufficiently developed and as a consequence the game breaks down.
- 219 Pupils, following a GCSE course, successfully dribble a basketball and look around in order to assess the options open to them. They understand the responsibilities of the different zone defence positions and start to understand the use of screening when attacking a zone defence. High attaining pupils successfully dribble defensively varying the height and speed of the dribble. Low attaining pupils fail to show proficiency in their pivoting skills during a game.

- 220 GCE Advanced Level pupils show a very good knowledge of the muscular system of the body and the majority of pupils apply this theory successfully. They explain muscle movements in execution of games skills, for example, the jump shot in basketball and the chest pass in netball.
- 221 From slightly below average attainment on entry to the school, pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress with their learning through both key stages and very good progress in the sixth form. Progress is constrained by the inadequate time allocation at both key stages. This is unsatisfactory at Key Stage 4. Many pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 successfully perform a range of skills, develop a sound knowledge of rules, and understand attack and defence tactics in competitive situations. They plan activities effectively and make good evaluations; they appreciate their own and others' performances. However, depth of learning and attainment are constrained by the time allocation.
- 222 Overall, behaviour and attitudes are good. Pupils dress appropriately for activities and participation rates are high. They work with energy and enthusiasm. They listen carefully and respond well as they take responsibility for organising themselves in groups or collecting and returning equipment. Pupils with special educational needs are well-integrated into lessons and are effectively assisted by their peers. Relationships are good and at times very good. Pupils co-operate well when practising in pairs or playing as a team. Pupils have been trained to accept decisions amicably, showing a sense of fair play; for example, they accept refereeing decisions. Good behaviour and positive pupil attitudes are factors contributing to good progress.
- 223 Overall, the quality of teaching is good with one quarter being very good. No unsatisfactory teaching was seen. Teachers always show good knowledge, understanding and application of their subject. For example, in a sixth form lesson, good knowledge of the way muscles work and the application of the theory into skills enabled teachers to challenge pupils' own knowledge and understanding and consequently extend their horizons. Teachers know their pupils well and relationships are good and this helps to foster a positive learning environment. Teachers ensure that pupils use the correct technical words. Generally, teachers have good expectations of both pupils' behaviour and work. However, on a minority of occasions, low expectations constrained progress, for instance, in a Year 8 health related fitness lesson, insufficient demands were made for quality work. Overall, at both key stages teachers make effective use of questions and answers to recapitulate and reinforce pupils' knowledge and understanding. For example, during a Year 10 football warm up pupils give the correct anatomical names of the leg muscles. Planning is good; it ensures progression and continuity across both key stages. Thorough planning, good relationships, and strong subject knowledge ensure all pupils, including those with learning difficulties, make good progress in their learning. Teachers are sufficiently flexible in their teaching to meet the needs of pupils with special educational needs. Pupils show a good acquisition of game skills and knowledge of these sports in Years 7, 8 and 9. These are developed further in Years 10 and 11 so that pupils improve their skills under pressure in order to use them effectively within a game and learn simple tactics to ensure skills are put to best effect.

- 224 The new head of department shows very good leadership with sound educational direction. Policy documents are clear; the departmental action plan is for the current school year, but arrangements are in hand to produce one with budgetary links and success criteria. There is satisfactory curriculum albeit games orientated. Time constraints limit activities at Key Stage 4. A corporate review is planned of curriculum, assessment, schemes of work, certification and also systematic monitoring of teaching and progress. A good and varied programme of seasonal recreational activities supports and enriches the curriculum.
- 225 The last inspection report gave no targets for action for the department. However, since the last inspection new staff appointments have been responsible for the very recent improvement. Plans are well advanced for the improvement in the department's development plan, reviewing of curriculum and assessment systems. Two new examination courses have been developed; a new GCE Advanced Level course for the sixth form and a GCSE course for Key Stage 4 pupils. In addition to the development of the curriculum, the extra curricular programme has been extended. The department is very well committed to raising pupils' standards of attainment and learning.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

- 226 As the school is a Roman Catholic voluntary-aided school this subject was not inspected.