

INSPECTION REPORT

THE PINGLE SCHOOL

Swadlincote

LEA area: Derbyshire

Unique reference number: 112995

Headteacher: Mrs S Tabberer

Reporting inspector: Mr John Beardsmore
16429

Dates of inspection: 13 - 17 March 2000

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
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Appropriate authority:	The Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr E Kinston
Date of previous inspection:	26 February 1996

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Mr John Watson	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development
			How well the school works in partnership with parents
Ms Betty Barratt	Team inspector	History	The school's results and achievements
			How well the pupils are taught
Ms P Hanage	Team inspector	Mathematics	
		Equality of opportunity	
Ms V Elliott	Team inspector		Curricular and other opportunities
			How well the school cares for its pupils
Mr B Newton	Team inspector	English	
Ms J Hall	Team inspector	Science	
Mr M Whalley	Team inspector	Modern languages	
Mr M Naish	Team inspector	Geography	
Ms P Draycott	Team inspector	Religious education	
Mr D Walker	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The Pingle School is an 11-18, mixed, foundation comprehensive school, which includes the South Derbyshire Sixth Form Centre, of which around half the students come from the Pingle School. There are 72 pupils who have written statements of special educational needs. Forty-nine of these are educated in the school's enhanced resource section, being integrated where possible in mainstream school life and lessons. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs, at 5.4 per cent, is well above the national average, though the proportion of other pupils listed as having special needs is lower than average. On balance the overall attainment of pupils on entry is just below the national average. The school is oversubscribed; its roll is growing and now stands at 1332, of whom 254 are in the sixth form. The great majority of pupils are white and only one pupil has English as an additional language.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an effective school, which has made good progress since the last inspection and is well placed, under the leadership of its new headteacher, to achieve further progress. A high proportion of the teaching is good or very good. Standards are rising at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form and, to a lesser extent, at Key Stage 3. The school is well managed, its sixth form is cost-effective and it provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Teaching is good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form.
- Academic standards are rising, especially at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.
- The headteacher and other key staff provide good leadership.
- The school makes very good provision for pupils with special educational needs.
- There is very good provision for moral development.
- There are high quality programmes of careers, personal and social education.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good.

What could be improved

- Standards should be raised further, especially at Key Stage 3, by more rigorous target setting.
- Aspects of teaching should be further improved, for example, consistency in the use of assessment.
- Provision for pupils' personal development should be improved.
- The position of the performing arts in the curriculum should be strengthened.
- Pupils should have greater access to information technology.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in February 1996. Since then it has achieved significant improvement. The inspection identified six key issues for improvement, all of which were addressed by the governing body in a detailed and thorough action plan. Since the last inspection the quality of teaching has improved significantly: the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching observed has fallen from around 20 per cent to three per cent, and the proportion of that which was good or better rose from 40 per cent to 68 per cent.

Examination results have risen by more than the national trend at GCSE and GCE Advanced level. Management has been made more effective by strengthening the line management system, though the targets set for examination results in subjects and across the school are not yet sufficiently challenging.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1997	1999
GCSE examinations	C	C	C	C
A-levels/AS-levels	D	B	C	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 have been close to national averages over the last three years with no significant difference overall in the attainment of boys and girls. The 1999 National Curriculum test results in the core subjects, when taken together, were in line with national averages. The results in mathematics and science were close to national averages but the results in English were below average. Standards seen during the inspection in the work of pupils in Year 9 matched national averages in all three core subjects.

GCSE results have been close to the national average over the last three years, with a higher trend of improvement than nationally. The 1999 results were close to the averages for both all maintained and similar schools. Girls' attainment was significantly higher than boys' over the last three years. The 1999 results in mathematics and science were above national averages and in English they were close to the average. Standards seen during the inspection in the work of pupils in Year 11 showed above-average attainment overall.

The GCE Advanced level results have been close to national averages over the last three years. The results in 1999 were lower than those of 1998 but they remained close to national averages. There was a significant improvement in 1999 in attainment at the advanced level of the General National Vocational Qualification and the qualifications achieved in other vocational qualifications were also above average. The sixth form work seen during the inspection was in line with course averages.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Most pupils like the school and show interest in their work. A small minority, mainly boys, lack interest and motivation.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Overall, the behaviour of the great majority is good, and sometimes very good, both in lessons and around the school. A few pupils, mainly boys, sometimes misbehave and require firm and skilful handling.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships between pupils are good. Most take advantage of the opportunities provided to develop initiative and work independently. Some older pupils become involved in helping younger pupils with their work.
Attendance	Attendance is satisfactory, being in line with the national average for secondary schools.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	Aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Good	Good	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 has strengths.

Teaching was satisfactory or better in 97 per cent of lessons observed and good or better in 68 per cent. Forty-four per cent of the teaching was good, 19 per cent very good and five per cent was excellent. Two per cent of teaching was unsatisfactory and one per cent poor. The quality of learning matched that of teaching. Teaching is consistently good throughout the school but is strongest in the sixth form. It is also consistently good across subjects. It is especially good in history and religious education, where all the teaching seen was good or better, and also in English, science, geography and design and technology. In all these subjects there was no unsatisfactory teaching. There was no unsatisfactory teaching either in mathematics, where teaching was good or better in over 60 per cent of lessons. In modern languages and music there was a high proportion of good and better teaching, but also a small proportion of unsatisfactory and poor teaching. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection, with significantly more good or better teaching and much less which was unsatisfactory.

Teaching has many strengths at all stages but there are some inconsistencies in assessment procedures, teachers' expectations, the match of work to pupils' learning needs and behaviour management. Pupils' progress and achievements are good at both Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form. Good progress is made by pupils with special educational needs, the most able pupils and the very small number pupils with English as a second language.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The quality and range of the curriculum are satisfactory at Key Stage 3, though there is not enough provision for drama and dance. All statutory requirements are met. Provision is good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. There are high quality programmes of careers and personal and social education but gaps in the provision of extra-curricular activities.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	The school makes very good provision for pupils with special educational needs and those withdrawn for work in small groups are well taught. The requirements of the national Code of Practice are fully met.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for pupils' moral development is very good. The school has an effective code of conduct and teachers provide good role models. Pupils are encouraged to develop attitudes of tolerance and respect and to take responsibility in various ways. Provision for spiritual development is good, especially in assemblies and religion. There are good opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of their own culture but there is less emphasis on understanding other cultures.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The school takes considerable care to ensure the safety and well-being of its pupils. It has very good procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour and for monitoring and eliminating bullying, racism and sexism. Teachers know their pupils well. Year heads and form tutors provide strong pastoral support.
Partnership with parents	Most parents have a high opinion of the school, which takes care to communicate effectively and maintain good links with them. The quality of information provided for parents, including reports on their children's progress, is good.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Leadership and management are good. Building on the achievements of her predecessor, and working closely with the senior management team, the new headteacher is establishing a clear educational direction for the work of the school. Leadership of most subject departments is good, and sometimes very good, though it is unsatisfactory in science. Heads of year provide effective leadership.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body is well led and effectively structured to fulfil its responsibilities. Governors are active and effective in their oversight of finance and premises, and are developing their understanding of the curriculum.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school reviews its effectiveness by analysing its test and examination results, and comparing these with tests of the pupils' ability on entry. Its use of test and assessment data is still underdeveloped at Key Stage 3. Monitoring of teaching is thorough and systematic.
The strategic use of resources	Teachers are well qualified to teach the curriculum. Provision of books and other learning resources is satisfactory. The number of computers is around the average for the size of the school but some are out of date and allow insufficient access to the Internet. Financial planning and monitoring are good and the school takes care to secure best value for money.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The teaching is good. • The school is well led and managed. • The school expects pupils to work hard and do their best. • Pupils make good progress. • The school helps pupils to become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The range of extra-curricular activities, including drama and sport. • The excessive amount of homework given at Key Stage 3. • The quality of information on their children's progress. • A small minority would like the school to work more closely with parents.

The evidence of the inspection confirmed the positive views expressed by parents. With regard to the negative views: inspectors agree that the range of extra-curricular activities could be wider; they found little evidence that excessive homework is currently being set at Key Stage 3 but recommend that the amount of homework set should be regularly checked; the school's reporting system is satisfactory but its way of grading attainment within teaching groups is unhelpful; inspectors note that the great majority of parents believe that the school does work closely with parents, and that it is currently seeking ways of improving this further.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1 Pupils' attainment on entry to the school is close to the national average. This is shown both in the results of ability tests at the time of their entry to the school and also in the standards of their work early in Year 7. National Curriculum test results at the end of Key Stage 3 have been close to national averages over the last three years. The trend of improvement overall during this time has been broadly in line with that nationally though there was significant drop in attainment from 1998 to 1999, especially in English. This was related to the fact that this particular year group had lower language test scores than the previous year group when they entered the school in Year 7. Whilst there has been no significant gender difference in attainment overall at this stage, girls have achieved significantly higher standards than boys in English. One important reason for this is the fact that the girls had higher literacy and reading test scores when they entered the school.

2 The 1999 National Curriculum test results in the core subjects, when taken together, were in line with the averages for both all maintained schools and those with a similar intake. When looked at separately, the results in mathematics and science were close to national averages but in English the results were below average. However, standards seen during the inspection in the work of pupils in Year 9 matched national averages in all three core subjects. The higher levels seen in English reflect the improving standards within the subject as a whole. The National Curriculum assessment results in other subjects were above average in design and technology, information technology, geography and modern languages, in line with the average in history, art and music but below average in physical education. First hand inspection evidence showed attainment to be broadly in line with the assessment results, except in physical education, where attainment was average, and music, where it was below. Attainment in religion is above the expectations of the locally Agreed Syllabus.

3 GCSE results have been close to the national average over the last three years with a higher trend of improvement than nationally. The 1999 results were close to the averages for both all maintained and similar schools. Girls' attainment has been significantly higher than boys' over the last three years but the gap between boys' and girls' attainment lessened in 1999. The 1999 results in mathematics and science were above national averages and in English they were close to the average. The results were well above average in English literature and sociology, and above average in business education, French and German. In other subjects results matched the average apart from in art, information technology and physical education where they were below average.

4 Standards seen during the inspection in the work of pupils in Year 11 showed above average attainment overall. This was reflected in the work seen in English, mathematics, design and technology, information technology, history, religion and music. In all other subjects, including science, standards matched the average apart from art where they were below average. Overall differences in the standards being achieved by girls during the inspection were less marked than has been the case in recent years with the only significant evidence of girls achieving higher standards than boys being in mathematics, geography, art and religion.

5 The higher standards seen during the inspection are attributable to the continued trend of improvement overall within the school and especially to the high quality of the teaching in the subjects where the improvement is most marked. The average, rather than above average, standards seen in science are largely attributable to insufficiently rigorous and consistent use of assessment to enable teachers to know pupils' capabilities and to set appropriately high expectations and targets for attainment. The below average attainment in art reflects the low levels of prior attainment of most of the pupils taking the subject.

6 The GCE Advanced level results have been close to national averages over the last three years. The results in 1999 were lower than those of 1998 but they remained close to national averages. There was a significant improvement in 1999 in attainment at the advanced level of the General National Vocational Qualification and the standards achieved in other vocational qualifications were also above average. The work seen during the inspection was in line with course averages.

7 Much attention is being given to raising attainment. In recent years there has been a growing focus on establishing clear benchmarks and the use of data for monitoring pupils' progress and setting targets for improvement. Overall systems are better developed at Key Stage 4 than at Key Stage 3 and in the sixth form. They are being significantly strengthened by the most recent developments in tracking pupils' progress, involvement of pupils in self-evaluation and personal target setting and detailed consultation with parents. More remains to be done, especially in making more systematic and rigorous use of the wealth of data and comparative indicators now available to schools, and in ensuring that whole-school practice in the use of assessment to monitor pupils' progress and attainment closely, is consistently reflected within subject departments.

8 At all stages pupils' literacy skills develop very well and they reach a high standard of competence. Speaking and listening skills are well developed through the opportunities offered in many subjects. In history standards reached are very high: pupils are very articulate and they listen well to each other and to their teachers. In geography pupils listen very well but there are too few opportunities for constructive talk.

9 Reading develops well. In English pupils mostly read aloud clearly and expressively from their own writing and from books. In most subjects pupils read and interpret information effectively in researching their work.

10 Pupils use writing effectively for a wide range of purposes - notes, annotations, diaries, letters, essays and stories. In religious education writing is unusually good with many examples of accurate and fluent writing from higher attaining pupils at Key Stage 4 and post-16. In history writing develops well throughout the course and standards are high. In geography pupils' extended writing is good. Writing is generally well presented and writing development across the key stages is good.

11 Pupils' skills in numeracy are satisfactory. In mathematics lessons, especially in Key Stage 3, pupils acquire a secure grounding in all aspects of numeracy and they use this effectively in other subjects. For example, in history they make very good use of graphs and can interpret statistics describing population and employment. In design and technology pupils can calculate and measure required quantities and use graphs to represent data.

12 Overall, pupils with special educational needs make good progress at all key stages. They achieve particularly well in English, mathematics, science, design and technology, modern languages and religious education. Good progress is facilitated by the commitment of teachers and the regular updating of subject specific learning targets, in addition to the cross-curricular targets agreed at the annual review. Targets are shared by both pupils and teachers and this ensures that pupils are well supported in their learning across the curriculum. Practice is especially effective in mathematics, design and technology and modern languages where work is well matched to pupils' learning targets. For some pupils and classes, the learning support team also provides assistance by the provision of in-class support, which also makes a significant contribution to the pupils' progress.

13 Pupils of the highest ability also make good progress overall. Their learning is being increasingly well supported as subjects implement the school policy for the more able and talented pupils. They progress especially well when their learning needs are clearly identified as, for example, in history, religious education and art, and they are provided with appropriately demanding work as a consequence. The very small number of pupils with English as a second language make good progress overall because the good support in lessons ensures that they have good access to the learning.

14 The standards achieved by pupils in comparison with their prior attainment are satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. There is however, some variation in this pattern between subjects. Achievement is consistently good in design and technology, geography and religious education, and also in history where achievement at Key Stage 4 and the sixth form is very good. In most other subjects whilst achievement is good overall it varies between key stages. For instance, in English, mathematics and music achievement is good at Key Stage 4 and the sixth form but satisfactory at Key Stage 3. In physical education achievement is satisfactory at Key Stages 3 and 4 and good in the sixth form and in modern languages achievement is good throughout.

15 The consistently good progress in design and technology, geography, religious education and history reflects the consistently high quality of the teaching in these subjects, and in particular teachers' good subject expertise, appropriately high expectations and very effective teaching methods. These result in the good development of knowledge, understanding and skills and in pupils of all levels of attainment achieving well. Higher attaining pupils reach good levels of maturity in their work and lower attaining pupils often achieve levels which are higher than to be expected in the light of their prior attainment. This is reflected in the high standards in design and graphical presentation in design and technology, in the high levels of insight and thought in religious education and the very well developed knowledge, understanding and skills in history and geography.

16 Where progress across the key stages is inconsistent, this is often due to shortcomings in assessment processes. For example, pupils achieve less well at Key Stage 3 in English than at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, because at Key Stage 3 the assessment of pupils' language development is not sufficiently linked to National Curriculum criteria, and pupils are not adequately informed about the levels they are achieving and the aspects of their work that they need to target for improvement. In mathematics, on the other hand, the pace of progress at Key Stage 3 is slowed by the slow development of skills in Year 7 with, in some instances, too little attention being given to building on to skills acquired at Key Stage 2.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

17 Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. Many enjoy coming to school and are eager to learn. They respond well to challenges and are interested in their work. They listen attentively and are keen to ask and answer questions. They are able to sustain their concentration throughout their lessons with very little time wasted. They make positive, constructive contributions to discussions and when answering questions. Those in examination classes are particularly diligent; they put considerable effort into research and into the quality of presentation of their work. Many pupils have computers at home of which they make good use.

18 Behaviour in lessons is good and often very good. Pupils are generally polite to each other in class and to adults. Behaviour is also generally good around the school, although there is some boisterous behaviour, particularly in congested areas and at break times. A small minority, mostly boys, are more challenging and are occasionally a disruptive influence, especially when the pace and content of lessons are less demanding. There is very little evidence of oppressive behaviour in the school and no sexism or racism. The few minor incidents of bullying which occur are quickly handled by staff, with appropriate parental involvement.

19 Pupils are trustworthy and have a good understanding of moral values. They show respect for their own and others' property. There is some litter but no graffiti.

20 Pupils form good relationships with each other and with their teachers. There is mutual respect between them. They co-operate well in lessons and build constructively on each others' contributions. Their comments are considerate, thoughtful and often sensitive and perceptive. They show appropriate respect for others' feelings and beliefs.

21 Pupils are very willing to take responsibility, for example, as prefects. Their personal development is good. Many pupils take advantage of extra-curricular activities such as the annual camp and foreign exchange visits to support their personal development. Homework is completed diligently and pupils are good at meeting deadlines.

22 Attendance is satisfactory and in line with the national average. There is very little unauthorised absence.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

23 The quality of teaching is good overall. It was satisfactory or better in 97 per cent of the lessons observed and good or better in 68 per cent. Forty-four per cent of the teaching was good, 19 per cent very good and in five per cent of lessons the teaching was excellent. Two per cent of teaching was judged to be unsatisfactory and one per cent poor. There is a high degree of consistency in the quality of teaching throughout the school, but it is strongest in the sixth form where 94 per cent of the teaching observed was good or better. At both Key Stages 3 and 4 about 60 per cent of the teaching was at least good.

24 Teaching is also consistently good across subjects with over 60 per cent being at least good in nearly all. Practice is of especially high quality in history and religious education, where all the teaching seen was good or better, and a high proportion was excellent. Teaching was also of very high quality in English, science, geography and design and technology. The teaching observed in business studies and sociology was also good. In all these subjects there was no unsatisfactory teaching. There was no unsatisfactory teaching either in mathematics, information technology, art or physical education; in all of these subjects teaching was good or better in at least 50 per cent of lessons, though a relatively small amount was judged to be very good.

25 In both modern languages and music the quality of teaching seen was wide ranging. In modern languages, for instance, nearly half of the teaching observed was good or better, including some which was excellent, whilst it was unsatisfactory in two lessons and poor in one. In music, over a third of the teaching seen was at least good, one lesson was unsatisfactory and one poor. A very small amount of the teaching in personal and social education was also unsatisfactory though overall the teaching here was good, often very good and occasionally excellent. The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection, with significantly more good or better teaching and much less unsatisfactory teaching.

26 The high degree of consistently good teaching results in pupils making good progress in acquiring knowledge, understanding and skills throughout the school. A key factor in this is the skilful sharing of teachers' good subject expertise, at best inspiring pupils' enthusiasm and enjoyment of the subject. This particularly well exemplified in history where pupils are taught to work accurately and with confidence as historians from the outset, resulting in the acquisition of good knowledge, understanding, highly developed skills and an enthusiasm for the subject, especially at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, where they make very good progress. The same applies in English, where teachers enable pupils to understand increasingly complex texts and to express their views effectively in lively discussion. This was shown for instance, in a lesson on *Macbeth*, when Year 9 boys working in groups prepared and presented to their peers spirited interpretations of the witches' scene, showing good understanding and response to the text. The impact of the teachers' good subject knowledge is also reflected strongly in the attainment of skills and knowledge in science, and also in mathematics where good subject knowledge enables teachers to assist pupils in the exploration of alternative solutions to problems. In modern languages, teachers communicate their enthusiasm for their subject to their pupils and most provide good opportunities for them to practise their language. Similarly, because of the teachers' good subject expertise in design and technology, pupils achieve high standards in designing and making products, and in research and graphical presentation.

27 Progress, however, is slowed at times by teachers not planning a good match of work to pupils' learning requirements. For instance, in English, mathematics and geography, sufficient attention is not always given to planning work appropriate to the variety of pupils' levels of attainment within teaching groups. Similarly, work in music is not always well matched to pupils' learning requirements at Key Stage 3, whilst learning is occasionally unsatisfactory in modern languages where the tasks set are too difficult. There are also instances when planning does not ensure progression and continuity in the learning, for example, in mathematics and music.

28 In most instances, however, pupils' progress is well supported by good lesson planning. Planning, for example, is a particular strength in design and technology, establishing clear and challenging but realistic lesson objectives. In history and religion the planning facilitates effective learning through imaginative and well-sequenced activities which are well matched to pupils' learning needs. The systematic use of assessment to support progress is more variable. Assessment procedures are a major strength in design and technology, history, geography and religious education and art, enabling pupils to know how well they are doing through positive feedback and the writing of formative comments. In other subjects practice is more variable. In most, work is marked and recorded regularly but in many instances, even where other aspects of marking are good, the guidance provided to pupils on improving their work is insufficiently helpful, especially in the case of higher attaining pupils where standards are often praised but challenge and guidance on how to improve further is not provided.

29 Pupils work productively and at good pace in most lessons because of the good planning, clear learning objectives and a good range and sequence of well-timed learning activities. Resources are also used effectively to stimulate learning. For instance, the best teaching in modern languages creates a rich variety of materials carefully focused around a core of language which enables pupils to make good progress. Pupils respond well to the high expectations of the teachers, often engaging in good intellectual, creative and physical effort. Good intellectual effort is well exemplified in many lessons in science. In a Year 8 lesson for example, pupils responded very well to the challenges presented in the new 'thinking skills' science programme. Higher attaining boys in Year 9 applied what they had learned in theory about the idea of pressure to carry out and calculate the force needed for a pencil point to pierce aluminium foil. Higher attaining girls in Year 9 were working from the Key Stage 4 Programmes of Study. A revision lesson in a Year 11 girls' group for chemistry was highly successful because teaching was enthusiastic, fun and motivating. Similar instances of high intellectual effort in response to the challenge of the teaching can be found in many other subjects and notably in English and history where pupils are often challenged very well intellectually through searching questioning, opportunities for debate and effective use of pair and group work. Across the curriculum the use of these strategies is variable and there are instances, for example, in geography where there is sometimes insufficient challenge in the tasks set and opportunities for pupils to think in depth, and in science questioning techniques in whole class teaching do not always take full account of the range of attainment in classes.

30 Pupils' creative and physical efforts are also good, especially when high expectations and a good balance of activities encourage them to both develop their skills and appreciate the subject. For example, they work well in design and technology, in response to the teachers' consistently high expectations and challenge. In music and art levels of creativity are more variable. Creative effort is particularly good in art for instance, when pupils are stimulated by a richness of opportunity in different media, projects are interesting and engaging, and expectations are high. It is less evident in art at Key Stage 4, when lower attaining pupils especially find the work difficult. In music, creative effort is good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, with particular strengths in composing and performing especially in the sixth form, where composing is confident and imaginative, and performing is often very good. Creative effort, however, is less consistent at Key Stage 3, mainly because of variation in teachers' expectations and levels of challenge, which sometimes results in pupils not being fully engaged with their work. Most teaching in physical education leads to a high level of physical effort. Tasks and levels of challenge in most of the practical lessons are well matched to the physical capabilities of pupils and therefore all are enabled to make progress. In good quality practical lessons skills are clearly broken down and demonstrated, so that pupils are made further aware of what they have to do to make progress.

31 Pupils concentrate well and work hard in most lessons. In the great majority a good pace of work is quickly established and sustained, with pupils responding with interest and quickly involving themselves in their learning. It is only very rarely that a lack of interest or motivation slows learning. This sometimes because the challenge of the work is not fully demanding, as at times in music at Key Stage 3, or because poor behaviour is not firmly managed, as occurs sometimes in science, where a small amount of immature behaviour, and time wasting, mainly by boys, is not always firmly managed. Similarly in art the poor attitudes and challenging behaviour of lower attaining boys sometimes leads to standards below their capabilities. In the great majority of lessons, however, behaviour management is highly skilled with any deviation being dealt with quickly and unobtrusively and learning is very strongly supported by good standards of behaviour. Good classroom relationships are a very strong feature of the great majority of lessons and strongly support learning. Pupils' interest and involvement in their learning is sustained well by the regular setting of homework as an integral part of learning. Most homework is of good quality planned to extend and to prepare for the next stages of learning and to assist pupils in the development of study skills. It is a key factor, for example, in mathematics in supporting the standards achieved by pupils. Only occasionally, as sometimes in English, are tasks set to finish off class work.

32 The most able pupils make good progress often because of their good motivation and the setting by ability, which enables teachers to pitch expectations and teaching at an appropriately high level. The introduction of the school policy for the most able and talented pupils is helping with their identification but most subjects do not yet have specific programmes to ensure that these are fully met. At times a lack of differentiation in the work results in the highest attaining pupils not being fully challenged. The very few pupils with English as an additional language progress well because of the good support provided in lessons.

33 Pupils with special educational needs are taught well. Their learning requirements are well known and classroom activities and organisation provide a good range of appropriate tasks that support them in acquiring the knowledge and understanding necessary to attain the targets in their individual education plans. Teachers are very effectively assisted in some lessons by the learning support staff, who work with individuals or small groups in close co-operation with the teacher. The teaching skills of the specialist teachers in the learning support base are good. This, combined with the relationships between them and their pupils and the willingness of the pupils to be attentive and work hard, enables the latter to make good progress.

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

34 The quality and range of the school's provision are satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Statutory requirements for the curriculum are met at all stages.

35 At Key Stage 3 the school provides a broad range of curricular opportunities, including the National Curriculum subjects, with some enrichment provided by two modern languages and personal and social education. However, the curriculum is limited by the lack of drama or dance. Information technology is provided in discrete lessons throughout the key stage but opportunities for pupils to practise the skills learned are not consistently provided across the curriculum, for example, in English and science.

36 The Key Stage 4 curriculum has good breadth, balance and relevance. There is a good range of academic and vocationally relevant courses, planned to ensure that the different needs and aspirations of pupils are met. The range of optional subjects provides pupils with good choice and is designed to ensure breadth in individual programmes and to give pupils of different abilities access to courses appropriate to their needs. The youth award scheme, for example, enables lower ability pupils and those with special educational needs to achieve success. However, the range of full and short design and technology courses does not currently provide an appropriate choice for all to enable full depth of coverage of some Programmes of Study. Furthermore, time given to those pupils who take a second modern language in Years 8 and 9 is not enough to enable good progression at Key Stage 4.

37 The sixth form curriculum has good breadth. The school offers a wide range of academic GCE Advanced level subjects, and General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) courses in business and health and social care. All pupils take the Diploma of Achievement in key skills, which adds further breadth. Religious education is provided for all: in Year 12 through the Diploma of Achievement and in Year 13, through GCE Advanced level general studies. Physical education is offered, but not all pupils take a programme of sport or leisure activities.

38 At Key Stage 3 and, to a lesser extent, at Key Stage 4, boys and girls are taught in separate groups for most subjects, in sets depending on their ability. The school adopted this policy as a strategy to raise the attainment of boys and some departments have used the opportunity presented to plan for different needs. In mathematics, for example, a GCSE examination without coursework was trialled for boys. However, in science there is no guidance in the schemes of work to indicate different approaches for boys and girls.

39 Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Pupils in the learning support base with special educational needs are well supported and encouraged to participate in all school activities. Those who can benefit from the main school curriculum are encouraged to do so and the setting arrangements allow in-class support to be efficiently provided in a number of lessons. There are very effective links between the subject departments and the special educational needs co-ordinator, which, together with the observations of the learning support assistants, enable any difficulties encountered by staff or pupils on the register of special needs to be dealt with quickly and effectively. The availability of staff within the learning support team and the programming of additional reading sessions during the morning registration time further improve the achievements of pupils with special educational needs. Individual education plans are of good quality and the requirements of the national Code of Practice are fully met.

40 Pupils who are placed in the learning support base are given the opportunity to join any appropriate main school lessons. For example, in the present Year 11 there are two pupils who receive most of the teaching within the base, but join in with the main school art classes and are expected to obtain a GCSE as a result. All pupils within the base receive their science, information technology, design and technology (resistant materials), art, music and physical education lesson from specialist teachers and in specialist rooms. Withdrawal time is kept to the minimum and is carefully monitored so as to avoid disruption in the pupils' timetable. Statements are given full consideration and all requirements detailed on them are met.

41 There is a detailed school literacy policy and a literacy committee involving most subjects in promoting and developing literacy across the curriculum. Most departments have a literacy policy or guidelines. The influence of this work can be seen in the displays of words around the school and in the good practice noted by inspectors in various subject areas, for example, history, religion, information technology and design. Although provision for the teaching of numeracy is satisfactory, the school has not yet produced a policy for this area of its work.

42 The programme of extra-curricular activities is satisfactory. There are particular strengths in music, which offer pupils varied opportunities to perform in choirs, ensembles and big band, and in concerts and tours abroad. In art, there is a good range of visits and work with artists in residence. There are also exchanges in modern languages and study visits by the history department. However, there is a limited range of sporting activities for boys and not enough for girls. There are no opportunities to participate in drama productions, there is no dance or science club. Arrangements to support homework and private study are good. Pupils' learning in information technology is also promoted by regular access to facilities at lunchtime and after school. One unusual feature of the school is that some pupils join in the programme of community courses aimed at adults, for example, in basketball and information technology.

43 Provision for personal, social and health education is very good and this includes sex, health and drugs education. Since the last inspection, effective work has been done to ensure good co-ordination between this course and the daily tutorial time. The personal, social and health programme is very well planned to support pupils' different needs as they grow up through the school. Recently, the school won an award for the quality of its health education. However, the policy to teach boys and girls in separate classes sometimes has a detrimental effect on pupils' learning in certain topics. For example, in lessons where questions such as that of teenage pregnancy and abortion arise, learning for both girls and boys would be enhanced by discussion where they hear each other's views.

44 The school makes very good provision for careers education and guidance. Each year group receives appropriate inputs of business games, experience of reception duties and interview practice, while those in Year 10 have a week's work experience in local organisations. This is very well organised by the school and pupils are well prepared for it. They are all visited during the week and fully debriefed on their return. There is also a flexible programme of work experience for those pupils with special educational needs who would benefit from it. Students in the sixth form are well supported in making their applications to university and have further opportunities for work experience. They also provide valuable support to pupils in Years 7 and 9 during their Industry Days. The school's two careers libraries and associated guidance systems are comprehensive and well used. The successful use of the Youth Award Scheme is of great value, particularly to those of lower academic attainment.

45 The school enjoys the support of many local employers who sponsor activities such as Industry Day and provide a large number of placements for work experience. Several also make a valuable contribution to curriculum areas such as business studies by supplying course materials and visiting speakers. Good links and constructive relationships exist with the partner primary schools and also with the two secondary schools, which work in partnership with the school at sixth form level. These links help to ensure that pupils settle in quickly and happily. The school's contribution to the community has recently been recognised by the Schools' Curriculum Award 2000.

46 Provision for pupils to develop spiritual insight into values and beliefs is good and is well supported by the high quality of school assemblies. Pupils are given valuable time in two assemblies a week to consider spiritual, moral and social matters. During the inspection, pupils from the assembly club helped to lead pupils' thoughts on the theme of sacrifice, raising the question of how they could help others in Mozambique. Some subjects contribute well to spiritual development. Teachers of religion make a very good contribution by enabling pupils to understand how faith can affect life and by encouraging them to listen carefully to the beliefs of others. The pupils' capacity to empathise is encouraged strongly in history, through, for example, opportunities to write a diary about life in the trenches in the First World War, and also in English and personal and social education. In other subjects, such opportunities are sometimes missed.

47 Pupils' moral development is promoted very well. There are high expectations for good behaviour, a clear positive behaviour code and pupils learn to consider the consequences of their actions on others. They learn about the importance of rules, competition and fair play in physical education activities. Pupils have good opportunities to discuss ethical matters. In English, for instance, pupils thought about questions of guilt and shame, arising from study of *The Crucible*. Geography covers environmental issues such as that of rain forests and modern languages promote pupils' interest in such questions as methods of recycling in Germany. In religion, complex questions to do with human life are well dealt with at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. The personal, social and health lessons also provide pupils with a clear moral framework within which to discuss aspects of health and sex education.

48 Provision for pupils' social development is good. All subjects encourage positive relationships and provide regular opportunities for pupils to learn the skills of co-operation in group and pair work. Adults in the school are positive role models. Pupils' sense of social responsibility is developed by encouragement to look after equipment and take care in practical work in, for example, art, music and science lessons. Pupils have opportunities to take responsibility such as acting as prefects in Year 11, and engaging in charity fund-raising work. Sixth form pupils help younger ones with paired reading and have their own committee. But there is no school council whereby pupils can take part in decision making about their school. After school activities and the residential camps and visits give further opportunities for pupils to gain social confidence and team skills.

49 Provision for cultural development is satisfactory. Pupils have good opportunities to appreciate their own culture and traditions but fewer to develop an understanding of other cultures, except in religion and geography.

50 Although provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall, there are shortcomings in aspects of provision for personal development. The lack of drama and dance, and of a school council, restricts opportunities for many pupils to develop self-confidence and insights into their own and others' behaviour. There are also gaps in the range of extra-curricular activities, which are mentioned above. Finally, the teaching of the personal, social and health programme in single-gender sets limits the scope for considering at first hand the attitudes of both genders to important issues, which affect both equally.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

51 The school cares well for all its pupils. Procedures for ensuring pupils' welfare are good. Pupils receive strong support from their tutors and heads of year, who work hard to ensure that the personal needs of individuals are met. The school has good, competent first aid staff, who give ready help in cases of illness and accident. Pupils know the arrangements and whom to approach for help. Risk assessment is carried out where appropriate, and due attention is paid to health and safety issues, for example, when pupils are on work experience. Procedures for child protection are very good and statutory requirements are fully met.

52 There are very good systems to monitor and improve attendance. These include electronic registers to record attendance and the vigilant checking of absence. There is regular liaison with the educational welfare officer who, together with the school's home links officer, acts as a link with home.

53 There are good systems to monitor and promote good behaviour. The school has clear measures for encouraging positive behaviour and well-defined support systems for identifying and dealing with incidents of misbehaviour. There is an anti-bullying code and clear procedures for dealing with any oppressive behaviour.

54 The procedures for assessing pupils' work, attainment and progress are satisfactory. Since the last inspection the school has developed a comprehensive policy on assessment and marking. At whole school level, effective use is made of data on pupils' attainment and potential from entry, to predict and check progress. The provision of centrally held data on attainment from entry has helped departments to measure progress to some extent. However, data is not yet fully computerised and departments do not therefore yet have easy access to it. Overall pupils are better informed about their progress and attainment at Key Stage 4 and the sixth form than at Key Stage 3. The use made of performance data and assessment results to set targets for attainment at Key Stage 3 is inconsistent across subjects.

55 At departmental level, assessment practice varies in effectiveness, with strengths, for example, in the GNVQ courses, where assessment is related to clear criteria, where marking is diagnostic and where pupils take responsibility for reviewing, recording and updating their own achievements. Practice is good in modern languages, where there is regular self-review by pupils of the four language skills, with target setting for the next unit. In mathematics, there is good monitoring of homework and class work and regular end of unit testing. In science, procedures for end of unit tests are well established but assessment does not help pupils understand where their strengths and weaknesses lie. The English department does not relate assessment consistently to National Curriculum levels at Key Stage 3. There are no systems to assess skills in core physical education and systems to assess information technology across the curriculum are not yet fully effective in all departments.

56 The use of assessment in planning the curriculum is inconsistent. However, since the last inspection there has been improvement in that decisions about pupils' placement in sets are now based on their prior attainment.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

57 Parents have a very positive, supportive view of the school. The school is currently over-subscribed. Of those who completed the parents' inspection questionnaire, the great majority felt that the standard of teaching was good and that the school expected their children to work hard and achieve their best. They felt that the school was well led and managed and was helping their children to become mature and responsible.

58 A significant number, however, felt that an excessive amount of homework was set. This view was not supported by most pupils, although the latter felt there is sometimes a lack of co-ordination in the setting of homework, resulting in uneven workloads. Some parents felt there was an insufficiently wide range of extra-curricular activities and the lack of drama and dance was particularly noted.

59 Inspection evidence supports the positive views of parents. Inspectors agree that the range of extra-curricular activities could be wider. They found little evidence that excessive homework is currently being set at Key Stage 3 but recommend that the amount of homework set should be regularly checked.

60 The quality of information for parents is good. The school has an excellent prospectus and a comprehensive annual report by the governors to parents. Both meet statutory requirements and are professional and informative. These are supplemented by regular newsletters. Reports to parents on their child's progress are issued annually and in Years 8, 10 and 11, targets are agreed between each pupil and the school's senior staff. Parents are invited to discuss these with the appropriate teachers and these meetings are well attended by parents. A quarter of those responding to the questionnaire felt they were insufficiently informed about how their child is getting on. Generally, reports provide a good picture of how pupils are getting on, though geography and physical education reports are sometimes imprecise about what individual pupils know and can do. Home/school diaries provide a generally effective means of communication between school and parents and a good home/school agreement is in place.

61 There is a supportive School Association, which organises a range of social events and provides a significant enhancement of the school's resources. A number of parents are also enrolled in community education courses held at the school.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

62 The quality of leadership and management is good and is one of the main factors in the continued development of the school over the past few years. Under the leadership of its newly appointed headteacher, the school is in a strong position to secure further improvement.

63 The positive impact of leadership and management is evident in the school's good progress since the last inspection. The governing body's response to the key issues in the inspection report was systematic and thorough. The quality of teaching has improved markedly since the last inspection: the proportion of teaching which is less than satisfactory has fallen from around 20 per cent to three per cent, whilst that which is good or better has increased from 40 per cent to well over 60 per cent. Both these figures are highly significant. Academic standards have improved. GCSE examination results have improved at a faster rate than nationally and National Curriculum test results been improved in line with the national trend. Results in the sixth form have also improved. The school is popular with parents. The inspection survey of parents' opinions indicated very strong satisfaction with the school in the key areas of leadership, teaching and academic standards, and the school is oversubscribed at Key Stage 3.

64 The development of the school in recent years indicates effective leadership by the previous headteacher. The school has appropriate aims, which are clearly expressed in a succinct mission statement and widely understood, shared and put into practice. The governing body and the staff of the school demonstrate a strong commitment to equality of opportunity for all. This is evident both in the high quality of provision made for pupils with special educational needs and in the development of strategies to meet the needs of able and gifted pupils. The quality of procedures for care and guidance and the pupils' attitudes and behaviour, described elsewhere in this report, demonstrate an ethos which is consistent with the mission statement.

65 In the short time since her appointment at the start of the present term, the new headteacher has made a very effective start in building on this firm foundation. Working closely with the senior management team and the governing body, she has conducted a very thorough review of the quality of teaching and consulted widely to establish the way forward for the school. In doing so, she has demonstrated clarity and firmness of purpose with commitment to the pupils and an appreciation of the school's strengths and areas for development. The members of the senior management team have provided loyal and effective support.

66 The work of the governing body is well structured to enable it to fulfil its responsibilities. The governing body is well led by its very experienced chairman and its members demonstrate a good understanding of their role. They are very supportive of the school and identify closely with its key aims. Over the past few years, including the period when the school was grant-maintained, the governors have been very active in planning for the development of the school site and its accommodation and resources, and in financial planning and the monitoring of expenditure. More recently they have been taking steps to become informed about academic standards and the curriculum, in particular by inviting heads of subject departments to present reports to their meetings and by observing lessons during a "Governors' Week" each year. This will enable them to ensure that they are asking the right questions and that their key decisions on the curriculum and on targets for improvement are soundly based on an accurate and realistic assessment.

67 The governing body fully meets all its statutory responsibilities except one, namely that the school does not provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils.

68 The leadership shown by those in middle management is good overall, and sometimes very good, though there are variations, for example, in science, where it is unsatisfactory, and where there are deficiencies in aspects of management. Leadership and management are particularly effective in mathematics, history, religion and design and technology. The impact of this is clear in the quality of teaching and the rising standards in these departments. Highly effective leadership of the learning support team has led to high quality provision for pupils with special educational needs. Good leadership in other subjects, including English, is also closely linked to improving academic standards and quality of teaching. Heads of year also provide effective leadership.

69 Another key factor in improving the quality of education has been the line management system that is now well established in the school. This involves regular meetings and contacts between senior managers and heads of departments, to monitor, discuss and support their management role. There are similar arrangements for heads of years. The monitoring of teaching (both by senior managers and heads of departments) is now thorough and systematic and this has undoubtedly made a significant contribution to the improved quality of teaching mentioned above. Those observing provide helpful feedback on lessons, though this would be even more focused and useful if it contained specific targets for further improvement. By virtue of its system of monitoring teaching, the school is well placed to adapt to the new national requirements for performance management shortly to be introduced.

70 The school's priorities, as expressed in the school development plan, are appropriate and the plan provides a useful agenda for action. However, although there is in fact an annual review of progress towards the completion of targets, this is not summarised in the present format, which would make it clearer. Planning for development is satisfactory at department level, though some targets set by subject departments are imprecise, for example in science, where monitoring is generally less satisfactory. Target setting at whole-school and subject level is an activity which needs further development. The school produces a wealth of assessment data on pupils and this is well used to set targets for individual pupils. However the school's examination targets are insufficiently challenging and need to be based on a more sophisticated use of the data available.

71 There is in the great majority of cases a good match between the expertise of the staff and the requirements of the curriculum – very good in some cases. The school has effective arrangements for the induction of new staff and for in-service training. The provision of learning resources – books, materials and equipment – is satisfactory, though some of the computers are old, and not powerful enough for modern applications, so that access to the Internet is limited. This restricts opportunities for those pupils who do not have access to a modern computer at home. The school buildings provide satisfactory accommodation for the requirements of the curriculum overall, though there are shortcomings in art and music. With the opening of the new sports hall, accommodation for physical education is good.

72 Financial planning and monitoring, in both of which the governors play an active role, are good. The allocation of resources is properly related to priorities in the school development plan. The school has proper regard to the principles of best value, for example, by comparing the costs of different suppliers, considering the appropriateness of different types of expenditure and comparing its costs with those of other schools. Specific grants, such as those for the support of pupils with special educational needs, are appropriately used. The sixth form is viable, in that the income that it generates covers its costs. Financial controls are firm, as demonstrated in the recent annual audits of the school accounts. The school administration is smooth and unobtrusive.

73 In summary, the school provides good value for money. This judgement is based principally upon the quality of teaching, the achievements of the pupils in relation to their prior attainment, the ethos of the school and the use which it makes of the resources at its disposal.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- **Continue to raise academic standards, especially at Key Stage 3, by:**

making more effective use of the wealth of assessment data available to set targets in subject areas and across the school (paragraph 7);

* extending opportunities for pupils to use information technology, especially through the Internet (paragraphs 71 and 149).

- **Continue to strengthen the quality of the teaching by ensuring:**

* that marking is consistently accompanied by clear guidance to pupils on how to improve their standards, and that targets are systematically set for achievement at the end of Key Stage 3 in all subjects (paragraphs 28 and 7);

greater consistency in levels of teachers' expectations, the match of the work set to pupils' learning requirements and progression and continuity in learning (paragraphs 27, 29, 30, 32) ;

* that individual teachers are well supported in addressing weaknesses in behaviour management (paragraph 31);

* that the best practice within the school is shared and built upon (paragraphs 27-31).

- **Improve the provision for pupils' personal development by:**

* raising the status of the performing arts, especially drama and dance (paragraphs 35 and 50) ;

extending the range of extra-curricular activities (paragraph 42) ;

extending opportunities for pupils to exercise responsibility, for example through a school council (paragraphs 48 and 50) ;

* reviewing the use of single-gender setting where this is not justified on academic grounds, for example in personal and social education (paragraphs 43 and 50).

In addition to the issues listed above, the governing body should also consider the following :

the leadership and management of science (paragraph 112);

the statutory requirement to hold a daily act of collective worship for all pupils (paragraph 67).

NOTE: items above which are marked with an asterisk are already in the current school development plan.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	201
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	58

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
5	19	44	26	2	1	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	1078	254
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	133	N/A

Special educational needs

	Y7– Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	71	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	143	2

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	1

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	20
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	34

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	8.5
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
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

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	112	91	203

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	45	67	66
	Girls	53	66	42
	Total	98	133	108
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	53	66	53
	National	63	62	55
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	19	37	22
	National	28	38	23

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	48	66	71
	Girls	59	69	56
	Total	107	135	127
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	53	67	63
	National	64	64	60
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	33	41	28
	National	31	37	28

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	107	93	200

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	41	91	102
	Girls	48	83	88
	Total	89	174	190
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	45 (44)	87 (87)	95
	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	36.8 (38.7)
	National	37.8 (36.8)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	N/a
	National	N/a

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	61	42	103

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A- levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	15.8	16.2	15.9 (20.0)	5.3	N/A	5.3 (1.8)
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	27	88
	National		N/a

International Baccalaureate		Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied	School	N/A	N/A
	National		N/A

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	0
Indian	0
Pakistani	0.2
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	0.1
White	99.7
Any other minority ethnic group	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	41	3
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	82.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	18
Total aggregate hours worked per week	479

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	80.0
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	22.3
Key Stage 4	18.6

Financial information

Financial year	1998-9
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	£
Total income	3,632,252
Total expenditure	3,630,704
Expenditure per pupil	2778
Balance brought forward from previous year	343,932
Balance carried forward to next year	345,480

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

1332

Number of questionnaires returned

354

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	31	55	11	3	-
My child is making good progress in school.	38	52	6	-	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	16	63	11	3	7
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	11	53	26	10	-
The teaching is good.	18	76	-	-	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	30	38	19	7	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	47	38	11	1	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	63	35	1	-	1
The school works closely with parents.	27	51	17	1	4
The school is well led and managed.	30	63	-	-	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	25	66	4	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	19	39	13	9	20

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

ENGLISH

74 The national tests for English at the end of Key Stage 2 for 1999 indicate that the attainment of pupils on entry to the school is close to the national average for pupils of similar age.

75 During Key Stage 3 English is taught in single sex groups of similar ability. Most pupils make satisfactory progress across the key stage and consequently the levels of attainment reached by the end of the key stage are about average. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Pupils' language skills develop well. Most pupils speak confidently and clearly and are increasingly able to adapt their language to different contexts. Some higher attaining pupils are very articulate. In group and pair work pupils discuss and negotiate thoughtfully, mostly express themselves clearly and are able to advance and defend a point of view effectively. In a lesson on *Macbeth*, Year 9 boys working in groups prepared and presented to their peers spirited interpretations of the witches' scene, showing good understanding and response to the text. They were able to evaluate their own and each others' work perceptively and tactfully. Pupils listen well to each other and to their teachers. Reading develops well with pupils showing understanding of increasingly complex texts and higher attaining pupils in particular reading aloud their own writing expressively - such as in a Year 8 lesson about myths and legends. Pupils use reference books readily and effectively.

76 Written work also develops well. Some work throughout the key stage is very competently word-processed although the use by the department of computers is not sufficiently developed. By the end of the key stage pupils' written work shows increasing control and accuracy in a range of different kinds of writing, including effective note-making and drafting. Presentation is mostly good.

77 The attainment of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 in the national tests in 1999 was below the national average both at level 5 and above and at level 6 and above. This reflected their verbal reasoning scores on intake. Inspection evidence does not support this assessment. Taking the four years 1996-1999 together the performance of pupils in English was above the national average. The performance of boys over that time span was close to the national average while that of girls was well above the national average.

78 The achievement of pupils at both key stages is good. At Key Stage 4 pupils, including those with special educational needs and higher attaining pupils, make good progress in the development of their language skills. Listening skills develop well and speaking shows increasing control of form and sense of audience and appropriateness. In a Year 11 lesson, middle attaining boys discussing issues of accent and dialect within the context of GCSE work on "other cultures and traditions" showed very good understanding and offered interesting ideas about the text being studied. Lower attaining pupils in Year 10 responded thoughtfully and sensitively to each others' personal writing, using the drafting process effectively. Written work at Key Stage 4 shows generally good use of note-making and drafting, increasing accuracy and sensitive response.

79 The department's policy for GCSE is to enter as many pupils as possible for the English examination but only those in higher sets (approximately 60 per cent of the year group) for the English literature examination. In the English examination in 1999 the percentage of pupils gaining the higher A* to C grades was close to the national average for all maintained schools. These results are an improvement on the previous year. The percentage of pupils entered who gained higher grade passes in the English literature examination was very high compared to national average. Inspection evidence indicates that standards in the present Year 11 are above average.

80 Pupils' competence in the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are well developed throughout the school in other subjects, as described in the first section of this commentary (How High Are The Standards).

81 In the sixth form students make good progress showing a generally mature spoken and written response to their work. Written work shows good development and there are some very accomplished pieces of writing. There are well-organised notes, analytical writing and critical responses. Lively discussion and intellectual excitement in a Year 12 lesson on *The Handmaid's Tale* showed students' good understanding and knowledge of the text and their ability to use evidence from the text to support their arguments. Standards in the sixth form are above course expectations.

82 At GCE Advanced level students can opt for either the literature or language examination. In the 1999 GCE Advanced level English language examination all students entered achieved at least a pass grade and the percentage who reached a higher grade A to B was well above the national average. In the English literature examination the percentage of candidates achieving a higher grade pass was well below the national average.

83 At both key stages and in the sixth form most pupils have positive attitudes to their work, nearly always showing interest, responding enthusiastically to the tasks set for them and maintaining good concentration and focus - often thanks to skilful teaching and the good relationships between teachers and pupils. Pupils work well together when asked to do so and show respect for each other's ideas. They are supportive of each other and show appreciation for each other's efforts. They respond very well to their teachers. When opportunities arise pupils are keen to take initiative or accept responsibility such as in feeding back from a group discussion to the class or in taking a leading role in group activities.

84 In almost nine out of ten of the lessons observed teaching was good, very good or excellent. About a third of lessons were very good or excellent. There is no unsatisfactory teaching, though occasionally during a lesson there is insufficient challenge for all pupils, objectives are too modest or the pace of learning slackens and there is insufficient progress. The good relationships which teachers maintain with pupils and the high quality of most of the teaching contribute significantly to pupils' progress, their enthusiastic response to most lessons and their good behaviour.

85 Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the subject and are nearly always effective in presenting information and ideas to pupils, enabling them to increase their understanding. Lesson planning is well grounded on the department's schemes of work and resource materials. Expectations of what pupils can achieve are almost always appropriately high and pupils respond very well to the demands made upon them and to the praise and encouragement with which teachers support their efforts. Teachers use a variety of teaching methods and offer pupils a wide range of stimulating learning activities. They are sensitive to the needs of all pupils in their lessons, though there is not always sufficient attention given to planning work for the variety of levels of attainment within each class.

86 There is good use of pair and group work and also some very good whole class teaching. Pupils are managed well: the generally interesting, varied and demanding work, and the good relationships with teachers, contribute to the good behaviour. Learning resources are effectively deployed. In nearly all lessons time is well used - pupils keep working productively to the end of lessons - and the pace of learning is brisk.

87 Written work is carefully marked and teachers' comments are aimed at encouraging pupils but they too rarely offer advice to pupils on ways of improving their work. In lessons teachers are good at assessing what pupils are doing and suggesting directions for improvement. However, there is insufficient self-assessment by pupils. At Key Stage 3 assessment of pupils' language development is not sufficiently linked to National Curriculum criteria and pupils are not adequately informed about the levels they are achieving and the aspects of their work that they need to target for improvement. Homework is nearly always used effectively to move learning on and to prepare for work to come.

88 The head of department provides good leadership and clear direction for the department and maintains a context for all staff to contribute and to take initiatives within a supportive environment. Teachers work well together and they work hard to maintain an effective learning context to help all pupils reach their full potential. The environment for teaching English is improved by the attractive and helpful displays of pupils' work and other materials to support their ongoing work.

89 The department has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection in addressing most of the issues raised. Teaching has improved and there is now no unsatisfactory teaching. Accommodation has improved and the department has a suite of rooms and also an office; sufficient teaching time is now allocated to the subject. However, the use of drama within the department's curriculum remains under-developed.

MATHEMATICS

90 Standards, particularly as demonstrated by GCSE results at the end of Year 11, have improved since the last inspection. Key factors in achieving this are:

- good, specialist teaching
- the amount of work, including homework, completed by pupils
- effective management, which provides a clear framework for mathematics, particularly important as there has been considerable staff turnover. Good progress has been made on the issues raised in the last inspection report.

91 The standards reached by pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 are in line with national expectations for their age group. Results in the Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests have improved since the last inspection and the 1999 results are in line with national averages.

92 Pupils enter the school with mathematical skills and knowledge that are in line with national expectations, although to the lower end of the range, and all make satisfactory progress over the key stage. Although progress for all pupils over the key stage as a whole is satisfactory, it is slower in Year 7 than in the other two years, especially for higher attainers. This is because pupils do not always make sufficiently rapid progress on topics in which they are already competent.

93 By the end of Year 9, higher attaining pupils can draw and interpret cumulative frequency polygons and solve linear simultaneous equations. Average attainers can simplify simple algebraic expressions, find unknown angles, and can calculate percentages of quantities, for example, increases in price. Lower attainers can use simple fractions in calculations, and can use a series of diagrams to assist in finding solutions to problems.

94 The standards reached by pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 are above average, with some pupils reaching standards that are well above average. This is confirmed by the results in the General Certificate of Education in 1999, which are also above average for similar schools. Since the last inspection results have consistently improved, especially in the proportion of pupils reaching the grade of A* to C. Nearly all pupils who take the examination receive a pass grade. All pupils make good progress in Years 10 and 11. This is due to the increasing amount of work carried out by pupils, (homework and revision as well as classwork), and the cumulative effect of structured teaching in both key stages.

95 By the end of Year 11 higher attainers can use the sine and cosine rule, simplify difficult algebraic fractions and draw and interpret a wide range of graphs. Average attainers can factorise quadratic expressions, find the interior angles of polygons, and use Pythagoras' theorem to find unknown sides in right-angled triangles. Lower attainers can draw and measure angles accurately, can change units with a reasonable degree of accuracy and draw bar charts and pictograms.

96 Standards at GCE Advanced level have remained in line with course expectations since the last inspection. This is confirmed by the 1999 results. In 1999 and 1998 all students who took the examination passed. The work of a few students is at a high level. Pupils are accepted on to the Advanced level course with a fairly wide range of GCSE grades, and they make good progress from their individual starting points.

97 By the end of Year 13, higher attaining students have a very good range of mathematical skills and have the ability to choose appropriately from this range in the solution of problems. Average attainers have a sound grasp of mathematical techniques but sometimes find it difficult to analyse more complex problems. Lower attainers can usually select standard techniques but at times have problems in applying them correctly.

98 Throughout the school pupils attain similar standards across all aspects of mathematics, reflecting the balanced course they receive. However, most pupils are better at explaining in writing, rather than orally, the methods they use to solve problems. Pupils, especially in Key Stage 3, have some opportunities to improve their numeracy skills systematically. However, many pupils need more practice to improve speed and accuracy. Pupils have good skills in applying information technology in their mathematics work, particular in Key Stages 3 and 4. This is due to well-planned opportunities to develop and use them.

99 The school has been particularly successful in the past few years in improving the standards reached by average attaining girls at the end of Year 11. The school attributes this to the single gender classes. Pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to others in their classes. Key factors in this progress are appropriate courses and specific individual targets.

100 The quality of teaching and learning is good. During the inspection week, the teaching was good in about six-tenths of lessons observed, and was satisfactory in the rest. Teachers' specialist knowledge is very good, and they are able to explain ideas and methods clearly. This competent, informed approach helps pupils to make progress. New ideas are presented in an appropriate series of steps, shorter and with more practical illustrations for those who find mathematics difficult. When teaching is good, the shape of the lesson is planned to take into account the concentration span of a particular group of pupils. In one lesson for Year 8 lower attainers, the sequence of activities, including an initial mental arithmetic "warm-up" session, kept pupils' interest and enabled the teacher to check what they understood. In most lessons there is a good introduction, often catching pupils' interest by the use of illustrations, and including a brief review of previous work. In some of the lessons where teaching is good, there is also a summary of key points at the end. When this happens pupils make more progress as it draws the different threads of the lesson together, prompts them to ask about problems and helps them to learn more effectively.

101 Although most pupils work hard and are well behaved, at times teachers have to work harder than they should to keep pupils on task. This is particularly true in some middle and lower attaining boys' classes. The need to monitor small groups of boys within these classes, to ensure they are working, slows down the pace of the lesson for others in the class. When teaching is good, similar groups of boys work well, as a clear framework for behaviour is explained and good-humouredly maintained throughout the lesson. Most pupils enjoy their mathematics lessons and want to do well. Examples of this are the good presentation of written work in exercise books and the regular completion and handing in of homework. In some lessons teachers are able, through their own enthusiasm, to generate an enjoyment of mathematics in pupils. When this happens pupils not only learn facts and how to use standard techniques, but also begin to think more deeply about their use of mathematics. In one Year 12 class, students concentrated at a high level as they worked through some new and difficult ideas. They discussed their problems in small groups, and found helpful the teacher's use of simple examples and her frequent summarising of the lesson to date.

102 The head of department gives very strong leadership to a team of specialist teachers who work well together. There have been considerable staff changes since the last inspection as teachers have left due to promotion. The systems put in place by the head of department, and the support she provides, have been major factors in improving teaching and raising standards.

SCIENCE

103 Standards in pupils' knowledge and understanding of science are average on entry to the school. Attainment at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, and in the sixth form, is average when compared with national standards. Key Stage 3 test results over the last four years have been average when compared with all schools. Last year, higher attainers achieved well in relation to pupils in similar schools; and the percentage reaching National Curriculum level 6 and above was higher than the national average for similar schools.

104 At the end of Key Stage 4, standards in the 1999 GCSE science examinations matched the national average. Performance overall was, however, lower than in the previous two years because the percentage of girls gaining GCSE double science A* to C grades fell to below the national average for girls, whereas in previous years girls attained above the national average for girls. In contrast, although the achievement of boys in 1999 was slightly lower than in 1998, their performance has remained above the average for boys for the last three years. At the very highest GCSE grades, A* and A, girls attain higher than boys but neither the boys nor the girls reached the national average for A* and A grades last year. Last year, standards in Advanced level chemistry were above average, those in biology and physics were below average, based on average points scores. Standards in science overall are as reported at the last inspection.

105 Standards in the work seen during the inspection are average at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, and at GCE Advanced level. Achievements at Advanced level are improving. Achievements in the chemistry Advanced level groups, especially in the current Year 12, continue to be good, as reported at the last inspection, supported by some excellent and some very good teaching.

106 By Year 9 the higher attaining boys and girls have an understanding of the adaptation of plant and animal cells for different functions. They have a deeper understanding of series and parallel circuits than when they were in Year 7; and they have an understanding of the reactivity series of metals in the periodic table. Pupils with statements of special educational need in Year 9 learn very well in response to some excellent teaching. Although their standard of work overall is well below the national average, they demonstrate a capacity to recall examples of metals which are more or less reactive than iron; and they can follow written and oral instructions accurately to set up experiments to find out what causes metals to rust.

107 In Key Stage 4, the highest attaining Year 11 pupils are achieving very high standards, using their numeracy skills well to balance equations and plot and interpret line graphs. They can achieve the highest standards of analysis and evaluation in their scientific investigations. They write extensively, applying what they have learned through creative writing. In the current Year 11 the higher attaining boys are achieving better than the girls, as last year. The lowest attainers in Year 11 are well below average standards in the quality of their investigative skills, experiencing most difficulty in the higher order skills of analysis, interpretation and evaluation. Their standards are higher in planning and carrying out experiments and in recording results. In a Year 11 class of average attaining boys, they could have gained higher marks in their investigations had they been better informed about the mark scheme. By the end of Key Stage 4 the great majority of pupils attain an externally accredited certificate either at GCSE or for the Certificate of Educational Achievement in science. In the sixth form, students are developing, for example, their understanding of organic chemistry, consolidating, extending and applying their knowledge of chemical reactions through the use of molecular diagrams. In physics they extend their Key Stage 4 understanding of radioactivity; and in biology, they predict and investigate the relationship between plant density and productivity.

108 Pupils reach satisfactory standards overall in developing their basic skills of literacy and numeracy through science. Progress in the development and application of information technology skills is, however, slow, as reported at the last inspection. Opportunities to use computers, for example, for data logging, are still limited, although beginning to improve. The provision for pupils with special educational needs is good and these pupils generally make good progress. Teaching in Year 9, for example, is very well matched to pupils' special learning needs and these pupils make very good progress. In Key Stage 3, the higher attainers make good progress in developing their thinking skills in science because the recent curriculum development in this aspect of science is effective.

109 The quality of teaching has improved since the last inspection. It is good overall and ranges from satisfactory to excellent, with three-quarters being good or better. About a third of the teaching is very good and occasionally excellent. Teaching quality is generally higher in Key Stage 3 and post-16 than in Key Stage 4, although there is some very good chemistry teaching in Key Stage 4. The pupils themselves have mainly positive attitudes to their studies, their behaviour is good and they act responsibly and safely in group work in the laboratories. Generally, in Key Stages 3 and 4, there is no consistent pattern of response in girls only, boys only and mixed groups. The best responses and highest levels of interest and motivation are linked to the fluency and enthusiasm of the teaching, the quality of relationships between staff and pupils, and the extent to which the management of the class is secure. Good quality teaching, and the positive responses to it, result in good quality learning and pupils achieving well in relation to their previous standards. A small minority of boys and girls in Key Stage 4 are not at all motivated to learn. It is their negative attitudes which result in underachievement in these lessons.

110 There are many strengths in the teaching, including consistently high standards in teachers' knowledge of their science specialisms, and these have a positive impact on learning. In Year 7 pupils have to think and apply their learning when making annotated diagrams for the first time. In Year 8 pupils respond very well to the challenges presented in the new 'thinking skills' science programme and happily complain that the work makes their brains ache. Enthusiastic teaching in Year 8 inspires very active engagement of boys both during whole class question and answer sessions and during practical work. Higher attaining boys in Year 9 apply what they have learned in theory about the idea of pressure to carry out and calculate the force needed for a pencil point to pierce aluminium foil. Expectations of higher attaining girls in Year 9 are high and they are studying from the Key Stage 4 Programmes of Study. The very good match of tasks to learning needs for pupils with special educational needs has already been reported. A revision lesson in a Year 11 girls' group for chemistry was highly successful because teaching was enthusiastic, fun and motivating. It was based on very secure knowledge of the subject and the promotion of positive mental attitudes. In Advanced level chemistry higher attainers were encouraged to understand new concepts in the abstract, whilst the lower attainers were provided with additional practical demonstrations to promote their understanding, in work on the fractional distillation of crude oil, for example.

111 Some teaching skills need further development. Inadequate use is made of assessment data and target setting to track progress, and inform teaching and planning. Questioning techniques in whole class teaching do not always take full account of the range of attainment in classes including Advanced level classes. Occasionally teachers do most of the work in plenary teaching, leaving little scope for the full and active participation of pupils. Sometimes expectations are over-ambitious, leading to too much content in lessons; and the final plenary review becomes rushed and ineffective. In these situations homework may be given out far too late for proper discussion of the requirements. A small amount of silly, immature behaviour, and time wasting, mainly by boys, is not always firmly managed to secure the highest standards of discipline.

112 There are many strengths in the science department, not least the high quality of teaching, good relationships, hard working technicians, whose hours are well below average for a school of this size, and the positive attitudes of the pupils who are prepared to put in the intellectual effort needed to succeed. Less well developed are the extra-curricular activities, use of visits, the science library, resources and information and communications technology to provide enrichment to the science curriculum. Some of the information to parents about the achievements of pupils is inaccurate and reports are uninformative. Some of the laboratories and preparation rooms are untidy and the storage problems reported last time persist. Leadership and management of the science department is now too heavily reliant on informal rather than formal procedures for monitoring and evaluating policies, procedures, roles and responsibilities and schemes of work. Insufficient use is made of target setting, pupil self-assessment and other assessment data to track progress and improve performance. Development planning is at an early stage and financial planning has the potential for unnecessary duplication. The continuing ill health of the head of science compounds these shortcomings in the management of such a large team of science teachers and technicians.

ART

113 Pupils' art skills on entry show more pupils below than above average, particularly boys. Although many still attain standards below expectations by the end of Year 9, the profile of attainment is broadly average by then. Pupils mostly achieve well for their abilities in one or more of the wide range of media they experience in their Key Stage 3 curriculum. Pupils' core painting and drawing skills develop appropriately, supporting projects in, for example, printing, collage, ceramics, textiles and stencilling work. These projects are well devised to provide practice in a commendable range of techniques, and ensure that pupils' skills and understanding progress well for their abilities. In some classes in Key Stage 3, pupils attain standards above average. Boys in a Year 9 mixed gender group, for example, doing colour-drawing related to Georgia O'Keeffe's work, were making good pastel compositions in large scale. In a Year 7 higher attaining boys' set, mixed media work reflecting Gaudi's style was well above average for boys. In general, though, higher attainment at Key Stage 3 is from girls, with several examples where boys' behaviour and attitudes reduce their attainment to below its potential.

114 The proportion of GCSE grades A* to C has fallen in recent years from above average at the time of the last inspection, to 28.7 per cent overall in 1999. This compares very unfavourably with the national average of 61 per cent. However, this is accounted for by very low results in art/graphics (soon to be phased out), and by the high proportion of lower attaining pupils who take art GCSE. Many of these have special educational needs, including some from the learning support base, and do well for their abilities. A very high percentage of candidates gain grades A* to G.

115 Art is a very popular subject at Key Stage 4, with over half the pupils opting for it. Work seen in the current Key Stage 4 reflects the very mixed attainment noted from the examination results. Pupils studying the various specialisms offered show markedly different attainment and characteristics. Pupils attain well, sometimes above average, and mostly higher than might be expected, in textiles/printing and in ceramics groups. Many do well in the drawing and painting option. Standards are predictably lower than average in the art and design groups, which are tailored and provided at present for pupils who are not otherwise taking GCSE exams. Of these pupils, some are from the school's learning support base, who frequently get a grade in art but no other subject. This option provides very good opportunities for these pupils. Where pupils attain less well than they could, and where standards are very low in the current Year 11, is in graphics, which the department is wisely planning to discontinue as an option. Some pupils' work in Key Stage 4 is above average, with very good use of all interesting media and good individual interpretation of ideas from an early stage. The skew of overall attainment by Year 11, however, is below average, because of the many low attaining pupils who are, nevertheless, enjoying and profiting from their courses.

116 At GCE Advanced level, results have been mixed. In 1999, after successful appeals, several candidates' grades were raised, making overall results about average. Current attainment in the sixth form covers the expected range.

117 Pupils' attitudes in their art lessons vary considerably. Many are positive about their achievements and enjoy their successes. Girls in particular work well generally. The school's single-gender teaching arrangements lead to better progress for girls, and for boys in higher sets. Those whose progress is adversely affected are the many lower attaining boys, whose poor attitudes and challenging behaviour lead to standards below their capabilities. Where possible, the department successfully mixes girls and boys, thus improving attitudes and standards. Attitudes are consistently better at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form.

118 The quality of teaching is generally good. With a key member of the permanent staff absent on inspection, three supply teachers were satisfactorily covering many lessons. Non-specialist teaching is also satisfactory. The consistently good and better teaching is from the art specialists, each of whom has a semi-specialism to contribute, in addition to their general art expertise. This variety provides the richness of opportunity in different media so beneficial to pupils' experience. In these classes, expectations are high, projects interesting and engaging and planning good. Teachers give effective consideration to which mix of media and range of artists will stimulate pupils to generate best progress in skills and understanding. Well-targeted, one-to-one discussions with pupils in lessons are a good way of providing challenge, encouragement and on-going assessment. Teachers manage classes well, although the unwillingness of some boys to learn, or to behave well is hard to overcome despite good teaching. Teachers are particularly successful with low attaining pupils, especially those with special educational needs, who are unusually well provided for in the department. These pupils' successes testify to the patient, well-informed teaching which has led to their achievements.

119 The last inspection report was extremely positive about art. Issues raised then within the remit of the department have been resolved. The use of information technology is developing well with many examples of information technology work on display, and some seen in lessons. Three-dimensional work is now very well represented in the curriculum, including a ceramics option at GCSE. Those issues outside the department's influence have not been resolved, however. Accommodation is still a key issue. Many shortcomings remain. Insufficient storage limits the scale of what pupils can realistically attempt. With a growing sixth form, this problem can only increase. That the large group of Year 12 students has no studio is very disadvantageous. Non-specialist rooms still provide an inappropriate environment for art. The outside demountable hut is inconvenient. Although technicians now provide good support, the department still has too little of their time, given all the difficulties outlined above. The department's response has been good; at school level the response has been insufficient to resolve the department's continuing difficulties.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

120 Attainment in this curriculum area is above average overall. By the end of Key Stage 3 pupils perform above the national average. In lessons, they design and make products of good quality. Particular strengths are problem analysis and investigation, evaluating against agreed criteria and presentation. There is little variation between boys' and girls' attainment. Pupils with special educational needs respond very well to the challenge of the work and higher attainers demonstrate greater capacity to analyse a problem and to produce more original ideas. Following very purposeful contacts with a main partner primary school, the school ascertains the prior attainment of many prospective Year 7 pupils. This encourages the early use by Year 7 pupils of a rigorous and structured design process and they show good progression in the decision making and judgements expected by Year 9. Good quality products are made in the four contributing areas of food, graphics, resistant materials and textiles.

121 At the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is also above average. The GCSE results in 1999 show 52 per cent of pupils gaining A* to C grades amongst the contributing areas. This is above the national average of 49 per cent. All pupils achieve an A* to G grade in design and technology. Their achievement is good and their relative performance is significantly better than in their other subjects. This continues an encouraging trend of improvement since the last inspection. Girls' and boys' performance is equally good and pupils with special educational needs continue to progress very well. Research, graphical presentation and 'making' are of a very good standard. In Year 11 resistant materials products are less well constructed and finished than those in other areas.

122 GCE Advanced level results in 1999 in graphical communication showed 17 per cent of students gaining grades A or B, below the national average of 24 per cent. The relative performance of these students, however, was better than in their other subjects. The work observed during the inspection was of a good standard, broadly in line with the course average.

123 The overall quality of teaching is good and often very good. Teachers show a good grasp of the subject knowledge and present and teach the subject in an interesting way, thus sustaining motivation and a good pace. Lesson plans are very good in all areas, although time for pupils to reflect on the progress made in lessons is not always well managed. Teachers know what they intend to teach and share the challenging but realistic lesson objectives with their pupils, leaving them in no doubt as to what is expected. Lessons start promptly and teaching methods and resources are selected to suit different abilities and to avoid time wasting. The advice given to pupils is judicious, evaluative and supportive, with interventions timed to avoid frustration and advance learning. A very orderly working environment is maintained and behaviour in lessons is of a high standard. Protective clothing is always worn without prompting.

124 Pupils are very keen to learn and successfully apply new and previously acquired knowledge and creative and constructional skills in new situations. When faced with new constraints and opportunities pupils are able to select and use an increasing range of designing and evaluation strategies, become more accurate and precise, and take more responsibility for the direction and planning for their work. A very good level of interest is maintained and pupils' concentration is sustained. They understand what they are doing, how well they have done and how they might improve. Pupils co-operate, collaborate, behave well and respond to instructions promptly in lessons.

125 The department is very well led and managed. Teachers are strongly committed to raising standards and improving the quality of teaching and learning. It is a successful department that knows what still has to be done and is maintaining an ambitious level of improvement.

126 Since the last inspection standards at Key Stages 3 and 4 have improved considerably for all abilities. The teaching programme continues to improve and a very good assessment scheme is in place. Pupils' over-reliance on their teachers has reduced and there are good opportunities for pupils to make their own design decisions.

GEOGRAPHY

127 When pupils enter the school in Year 7, their attainment is slightly below the national average. The pupils make good progress through Years 7 to 9 and, by the end of Key Stage 3, their attainment matches the national average. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 overestimate attainment (74.9 per cent of pupils working at level 5 or above in 1999, compared with the national average of 66 per cent), but show consistent attainment by the end of the key stage over the last three years.

128 In Key Stage 4, pupils continue to make good progress and, by the end of the key stage, their attainment is in line with the national average. This is reflected in GCSE results, which show an improvement in 1998 and 1999 over 1997. In 1999, 51.2 per cent gained Grades A* to C compared with 53.1 per cent nationally. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in each key stage.

129 Progress is good in Years 12 and 13 and, by the end of their time in the sixth form, students attain broadly in line with the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining pass grades at GCE Advanced level is higher than the national average, but the percentage gaining grades A or B is lower (23.5 per cent in 1999 compared with the national figure of 34.8 per cent).

130 The pupils' attainment is similar to that reported at the last inspection with the exception that the proportion gaining grades A or B at GCE Advanced level is lower. Girls perform better than boys across the age range.

131 Given their prior attainment, pupils achieve well in the subject, including higher attaining pupils and those with special educational needs. In both key stages and in the sixth form, they gain experience of investigating questions and issues through analysis of a range of data. Teachers use their very good subject expertise to set up this enquiry-based learning efficiently, both in classwork and in homework tasks, which help pupils take their learning forward. The pupils record their findings in well organised written work, maps and diagrams. Their enquiry skills are well developed and they maintain their books and folders carefully, taking pride in their work. The presentation of their work is often good and sometimes very good. They are greatly encouraged in this by the high expectations of the teachers.

132 These experiences in enquiry enable lower attaining pupils in Key Stage 3 to achieve well. In one Year 7 class, for example, they could distinguish between oblique and vertical air photographs of the local area and interpret features shown. In higher sets in Year 8, they could evaluate four methods of controlling floods based on their case study of York. In Year 9, pupils could sort settlements into hierarchies and understand the idea of threshold. Map skills are well developed in Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 4, pupils can sift text and diagrams to review recent trends in tourism and the issues that arise. They know the key features of the earth's crust and understand the basic causes of earthquakes. Year 11 pupils can recall processes involved in coastal erosion and in migration in Brazil. In the sixth form, pupils can use technical expressions correctly and can analyse complex diagrams. A Year 12 class enjoyed revealing the examples of bias provided by photographs of various settlements and understood some of the reasons for prejudice about places.

133 Pupils make the most of the good opportunities which the teachers offer for developing their literacy. They read aloud with confidence, use technical vocabulary well and can write expressively, as for example in Year 10, when they wrote the diary of a hill farmer. They listen very well, but do not often extend their oral answers sufficiently in class. In a Year 8 lesson, however, the discussion in pairs about issues concerning the removal of hedgerows was both creative and constructive. Teachers also provide good opportunities for the development of pupils' numeracy. Pupils construct and interpret a range of graphs and other statistical diagrams and many manage this well.

134 The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have very good management skills and create enabling learning environments in their classrooms. The pupils respond very well and have positive attitudes towards the subject. This is reflected in their very good behaviour, their productive work rates and their good levels of concentration. In the lessons observed, the standard of teaching was never less than satisfactory, sometimes good or very good and occasionally excellent. Teachers are well organised, provide effective resources for learning and plan their use in well-timed lessons. Marking is thorough and regular, but written comments for Years 7 to 11 do not provide enough suggestions as to how pupils can improve. The teachers do have high expectations of the pupils' response and achievement, but do not challenge pupils to develop their thinking skills effectively enough.

135 Management of the department is good and staff work very well together as a professional team. There has been a good level of improvement since the last inspection, when the key point for action was to develop teaching and learning strategies further, including the use of information technology. A programme of information technology work has now been introduced in Key Stage 3 and Year 12 and there are plans to extend this as access to the Internet becomes available in the school. The electronic weather station is used well. Further development in information technology work is limited by the lack of availability of suitable computers, and more opportunities are needed in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form.

HISTORY

136 Pupils' attainment in history on entry to the school is just below average. At the end of Key Stage 3 it is broadly in line with the national average. This is shown both in the results of the National Curriculum assessment in 1999 and in the work seen during the inspection of pupils in Year 9. Results at GCSE have been close to national averages over the last three years but the above average levels being reached by pupils currently in Year 11 indicate that standards are improving significantly, reflecting the general trend of improvement in the department and the high quality of the teaching. Girls achieved higher standards than boys in 1999, but less difference was seen in the work during the inspection. The size of the cohort entered for history has been below average over the last three years but numbers are increasing significantly. Standards have been below average at GCE Advanced level but the work of Year 13 students shows attainment which broadly matches the average. The numbers studying for GCE Advanced level are growing rapidly.

137 Pupils' progress and achievement are good at Key Stage 3 and very good at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Progress is slower at Key Stage 3 because of the low allocation of time for the subject in Years 7 and 9. This limits the depth in which the subject can be studied and hinders progression and continuity in learning, despite the carefully planned strategies by the department to offset the disadvantages arising from only one lesson per week. Pupils' learning is inspired at both Key Stages 3 and 4 and in the sixth form by teaching of very high quality. Teaching is very good overall and was judged to be good or better in all lessons. In 12 per cent it was very good and in 25 per cent of lessons it was excellent.

138 Teachers use their very good subject expertise and enthusiasm skilfully in planning well structured Programmes of Study to meet National Curriculum and external examination requirements. They use it most importantly to arouse pupils' interest in the subject, and to enable them to work accurately as historians from Year 7 onwards. Many pupils learn to share their teachers' love of history and progressively acquire good knowledge, understanding and historical skills. The very strong emphasis on the systematic development of the key history skills of evidence-based investigation, analysis, causation, chronology and empathy enable them to be confident in their use. They rapidly learn to use historical sources to identify information and, to a lesser extent, learn to analyse them critically and to judge their reliability.

139 The most able pupils, however, do develop good analytical approaches especially by Key Stage 4 and use their knowledge and understanding increasingly effectively in the debate and discussion of issues. This was very well reflected during the inspection in a Year 11 lesson, when pupils engaged in intellectual effort and learning of high quality in response to the high challenge in the teaching; they thoroughly enjoyed challenging each other in well substantiated debate about the options available to President Kennedy at the time of the Cuban crisis. All pupils respond well to the consistently and realistically high expectations of the teachers and, as consequence, their progress is often better than to be expected. This is especially evident in the case of lower attaining pupils. In a Year 7 lesson, for instance, average to lower attaining pupils worked at full stretch and engaged in very good intellectual effort in the debate of events leading to the Battle of Hastings and the reason for the Norman victory. They were enabled to learn at this demanding level by the high expectations of the teacher and skilfully and imaginatively planned and delivered sequence of learning activities. Similarly in a Year 8 lesson lower attaining pupils, many of whom had statements of special educational needs, made good progress in learning about the changes in agriculture during the eighteenth century. Many demonstrated much better than to be expected factual knowledge, though levels of understanding were basic at best and many had poor recall of earlier learning. Nevertheless, all were thoroughly involved in their learning and worked very well together. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress overall as a result of the good and sensitive match of the work to their learning needs. The very good match of work to pupils' learning requirements in general is a significant strength and, together with teachers' consistently high expectations results in all pupils, including the most able, making good progress.

140 Good collaborative learning is a feature of many lessons and is strongly supported by well planned pair and group work. Pupils are further challenged by the effective use of questioning to probe understanding and develop thinking. Pupils engage closely with their learning, they concentrate well and work hard throughout lessons. Behaviour is very good - well supported by the highly effective strategies for behaviour management and the pace and interest of the work. Pupils' levels of involvement and responsibility for their own learning deepen as they progress through the school, culminating in very mature attitudes of the great majority of students in the sixth form. The rapidly increasing numbers choosing to study history at GCE Advanced level and beyond at university strongly reflect the very good foundations laid at Key Stages 3 and 4. Students' maturity as students of history was well reflected in a Year 12 lesson when students demonstrated very good knowledge, depth of understanding and application of historical skills in the discussion of the controversy surrounding Irish Home Rule in the nineteenth century.

141 Pupils undertake significant personal study in the sixth form, building on to the strong emphasis placed on the value and importance of homework as an integral part of learning at Key Stages 3 and 4. At all stages the tasks set are of good quality and carefully planned to extend learning in lessons. The work set is generally very well completed reflecting the keenness of many pupils to do well.

142 Pupils are well informed about their progress and attainment, especially at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, through systematic and consistently implemented procedures for assessment. These monitor pupils' achievements closely and are used well in teaching and curriculum planning and in target setting, especially at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Target setting at Key Stage 3 is less rigorous and systematic. At this stage assessment is well linked to National Curriculum levels but these are not sufficiently used to help pupils to set themselves challenging targets and thus to complement the thorough and detailed marking which does help pupils improve their standards.

143 This is a vibrant, thinking department - very well led and with a very strong and shared commitment to achieve the very highest standards in teaching and academic work. The head of department provides excellent leadership and a very clear direction for the work in history. Systems for the support, guidance and monitoring of practice are well developed. Resources, including information technology, are very well used to support learning, and the accommodation is used very effectively to inspire interest in history and to establish high expectations and standards. Very good progress has been made since the last inspection in addressing all of the issues identified at that time. Standards are improving significantly and the department is growing rapidly in terms of numbers at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Although currently very well led and managed, the future development of the department is complicated by a lack of a clear management structure and by the fragmented nature of staffing arrangements and the siting of some of the accommodation at some distance from the two main history teaching rooms and office.

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

144 At the end of Key Stage 3, on the basis of the teacher assessment, confirmed by inspection evidence, pupils attain levels higher than the national average. By the end of the key stage pupils have a good range of knowledge of the features of word processors, spreadsheets and drawing programs. They can, for instance, plan a kitchen using a drawing program which provides them with the basic components necessary in a kitchen. In both science and design and technology they use computers to collect, store, retrieve and present scientific information. A Year 9 lower attaining group was able successfully to use a drawing program to construct an image of traffic lights that was to be sequenced using a computer program.

145 At the end of Key Stage 4 pupils attain grades in GCSE information studies that are below the national average, but a very much higher percentage of the year group take the full GCSE course, nearly 70 per cent compared to about 13 per cent nationally. The attainment of girls and boys is broadly comparable. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and achieve well because there are often appropriate, specially developed materials, and individual support in the laboratory. About 30 per cent of pupils take the short course and nearly 40 per cent achieve grades in the range A* to C, which is close to the national average. Throughout the key stage, pupils acquire information technology skills to use in their project work. Pupils can produce a publicity package for a new business in the area, they can design a new computer room and can construct a package to manage a club and its membership records.

146 In both Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4, in most subjects, including modern languages, art and history, pupils make good use of information technology to enhance their learning. Year 10 pupils, for instance, have communicated by e-mail with students in Quebec to find out about a recycling project. Good use is made of information technology to help pupils with special educational needs in the learning support base, though not enough use is made in English, science and geography.

147 At GCE Advanced level the pass rate is better than the national average, although only a small number of pupils obtain the highest grades, A and B. Pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of the use of information technology tools, such as word processing, spreadsheets, databases and drawing programs. They use many of the advanced features of these well in their projects. Sometimes projects are not sufficiently evaluated and pupils do not keep accurate logs of their activities. Pupils on GNVQ courses have good information technology skills and make good use of information technology in their assignments.

148 Overall, the quality of teaching and learning at all levels is good. The teaching of the specialist teachers, who have good knowledge of the hardware and software, is always good or very good. Teaching is good when the lessons are well planned to include a variety of activities. Sometimes, however, the teacher makes very little input and the pupils' learning, whilst satisfactory, is restricted by the limited range of strategies used. Pupils' attention and interest are highest when they have a direct interest in their project, for example, a pupil who had created a computer package to administer a sports day, which his mother had tested in her primary school. Teachers generally have appropriate expectations of pupils, but sometimes the targets set for more able pupils are not sufficiently demanding.

149 The information technology department is well managed and there is a rigorous system for monitoring teaching. Teaching is well supported by a recently appointed technician. Although there is a sufficient number of computers, they are in general not up-to-date, and cannot run modern software. Access to the Internet and e-mail is severely limited, which restricts pupils' access to a wide range of data. The computer rooms are heavily used for information technology teaching and this limits access for subject departments. The computer rooms do not have air-conditioning and become uncomfortably hot, limiting pupils' ability to concentrate.

150 Since the last inspection standards at the end of Key Stage 3 have improved and are now above national standards. The assessment of pupils' information technology capability is now reliably assessed by the department and information technology is more widely used by other departments. A well-qualified technician has been appointed.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

151 This is an aspiring department with a highly committed team of teachers working hard to raise standards. French is the first language with German currently taken by abler linguists in Year 8.

152 At Key Stage 3 modern language results show an improvement from 1998 to 1999 to a point above national averages. Attainment at GCSE since 1997 has also improved. The percentage of grades A* to C in both French and German lies well above national averages, although this in part reflects a relatively low proportion of the year group being entered for the full GCSE. Nonetheless those entered perform well by comparison with their performance in other subjects. Inspection evidence confirms these results. With the exception of German in 1999, modern language results over the last two years in the short course GCSE have been approximately a grade higher than the national average. At GCE Advanced level there is too small a statistical sample to make valid comparisons with national performance, especially as no consistent pattern emerges from either French or German in the last two years.

153 Progress through Key Stage 3 is generally good. Many average and low attainers including those with special educational needs achieve well for their ability and their standards are often high. They respond well to work set and to encouragement from their teachers who know them well. For example, a Year 9 French class of low attainers enjoyed practising a limited number of structures describing people's appearance. By the end of the lesson they were able to use the language quite accurately in both speech and writing to describe hair colour and facial features.

154 Pupils at both key stages take care over written work. At Key Stage 3 they begin to write in a variety of styles, from simple poems and raps to short personal accounts and letters. At Key Stage 4, average and higher attainers learn to use a range of tenses in their writing. Some, for example, construct simple stories in the past tense. Course work is helping to raise standards of writing and by the end of the key stage, many pupils can write at an appropriate level about their own experiences, for example, on an exchange visit to Germany, about their own region or about work experience.

155 Speaking standards overall are sound. At both key stages a good number of pupils are confident speakers and improve their fluency by their willingness to try to communicate. Achievement is good at both key stages, but the attainment of some higher attainers, especially at Key Stage 4, is held back because they are not required systematically to work from memory or to make longer utterances.

156 Standards in the sixth form are variable and reflect the calibre of student entry. Most find the transition from GCSE very demanding and not all have a secure base of knowledge from which to begin the course. They extend their knowledge of grammatical rules well. They need more practice, with the help of supportive marking and re-drafting, in applying that knowledge accurately to extended pieces of writing. They show interest in how the language works and ask questions to clarify their understanding. Students in German are not presented with a consistently accurate model of the spoken language.

157 Pupils at both key stages and in the sixth form have, with few exceptions, positive attitudes to their learning. They are prepared to work hard, are eager to learn and respond well. For example they react maturely to opportunities for pair and group work. Those boys observed in Key Stage 3 lessons were particularly impressive in the way that they took part in activities involving gesture and movement with real enjoyment and with no hint of silliness. Pupils persevere at tasks, seek help when appropriate in order to complete their work and help each other when the occasion arises. In the few instances when work was too difficult or its pace too slow, most pupils continued to concentrate well and did not become disruptive. Pupils relate very well to one another and to their teachers. They apply themselves well to listening tasks and many volunteer to answer teacher questions.

158 Teaching is good at Key Stage 3 and satisfactory at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Just over 40 per cent of lessons observed were of good, very good or excellent quality, with a similar proportion satisfactory. Teaching was unsatisfactory in two lessons observed and poor in one. There are examples of good or better teaching at each key stage and in the sixth form. In their main language teachers' subject knowledge is good. They are enthusiastic about their subject and communicate this well to their pupils. They plan carefully, producing or adapting much of the material that they use to make it accessible to learners. This promotes effective learning, especially on the part of many average and low attaining pupils. Conversely learning is unsatisfactory in the few instances where the tasks that they have to do are too difficult. The poor teaching was attributable to an exceptional lack of subject knowledge in a teacher's second foreign language.

159 At its best teaching creates a rich variety of materials carefully focused around a core of language. This enabled a Key Stage 3 French class, for example, to make significant progress across the four language skills by using and re-using the language. Through a series of motivating activities they were able by the end of the lesson to recognise and use with confidence a good range of expressions about hobbies and leisure pursuits.

160 Teachers establish good relationships; they value pupil contributions and because they correct error sensitively, pupils are encouraged to speak and try out their language. In most classes, though less so in German, teachers create frequent opportunities for pair work. Where successful, this enables learners to consolidate their knowledge of the spoken language. Some pair work is, however, attempted before pupils have been adequately prepared and does not therefore extend pupil competence. Time is generally well used. Objectives are often shared with pupils at the beginning of the lesson so that they know what they are to learn. Work is regularly marked but more guidance on how pupils could improve would help to raise standards further. Homework is regularly set and is of good quality.

161 The head of department has only been in post since September 1998. Much significant development work has taken place since. A very helpful departmental handbook contains several detailed policy statements shaping the department's work. An effective system for assessing National Curriculum levels at Key Stage 3 has been devised and teachers are being encouraged to share ideas and materials.

162 There is a rich range of extra-curricular activities including exchanges with both France and Germany. The current position of German in the curriculum is, however, at risk. The single weekly lesson in Year 8 and 9 does not provide an adequate base for the development of oral competence in particular, especially as the ability level of those taking the language is being broadened. Facilities for overhead projection in some classrooms are inadequate and have an adverse impact upon learning.

163 Good progress has been made since the last inspection. GCSE results show a rising trend; teachers' use of the foreign language is extensive if not yet wholly consistent; a promising start has been made on developing the use of reading for pleasure in Year 8 French and there is some effective use of information technology, which has been built in as a regular component in the revised schemes of work. To raise standards further the department should focus its efforts on oral attainment of higher attainers and on written work in the sixth form.

MUSIC

164 The standards of attainment in music at the end of Key Stage 3 are below average although a significant number of pupils who have instrumental lessons attain above this level. This is below the department's own teacher assessments, although the discrepancy is not great. At the end of Key Stage 4 examination results and inspection evidence indicate that attainment is above average. The trend over several years has been consistent. Attainment at the end of sixth form education is good. Groups are small, but students consistently achieve 100 per cent passes, with many gaining high grades.

165 In Key Stage 3 achievement is satisfactory although there is some under-achievement amongst some middle ability pupils when work is not closely matched to their capabilities or when lessons proceed at too slow a pace. Pupils can use given structures and chord schemes to create melodies. Higher attaining boys in a single sex class in Year 7 developed imaginative rhythm patterns to add more interest to their compositions, and higher attaining pupils in Year 9 were able to internalise their work sufficiently well to be able to improve their work even in a very noise-congested information technology room. However, pupils of average and lower attainment rarely develop sufficient keyboard technique to be able to realise fully their composing intentions and do not listen sufficiently closely to completed pieces to ensure that the effect is musical. Pupils' listening skills are satisfactory, and most are able to use appropriate subject language to describe features of their work. Singing is enthusiastic, although the tone quality is rough. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in music and pupils from the learning support base made very good progress in comparison with their general levels of ability.

166 Achievement in Key Stage 4 is good. Pupils have particular strengths both in composing and in performing. Higher attaining pupils play sophisticated repertoire with a good sense of style and compose imaginatively, at times producing work with memorable features. Achievement in the sixth form is very good. Their research is thorough and scholarly, and conveys enjoyment of the activity as well as of the topic selected. Their composing is confident, imaginative and consistent, and their performing is generally very good, with some making outstanding achievements. Particularly good progress is made early in the course as students come to terms with the more rigorous requirements of the GCE Advanced level course.

167 Pupils in Key Stage 3 have positive attitudes towards music, although when the challenge is not fully demanding they become restless and are easily distracted. They enjoy working in pairs but do not always use the allocated time purposefully. They treat equipment well and in the main music room are particularly careful to avoid instruments left for band rehearsals. In Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form pupils are fully committed to the subject and make consistently determined efforts.

168 The quality of most teaching in Key Stage 3 is satisfactory. Some very good teaching was seen and in two lessons teaching was unsatisfactory or poor. The quality of learning matches that of teaching. Teachers are well qualified and when their very good subject expertise is used to its full advantage to provide pupils with clear musical examples pupils respond well and maintain a good pace of work. When pupils are encouraged to use their own instruments in lessons, the experience of the whole class is enriched: a saxophone player in Year 8 confidently improvised a melodic sequence over riffs and ostinati played by the rest of the class. In some lessons the content is not fully matched to the needs of different pupils and insufficient recall and consolidation of previous learning prevents pupils from making good progress. Teachers' expectations of middle and lower ability pupils are not high enough. However, in one lesson with pupils from the learning support base pupils' needs were fully catered for, inter-action was very good and pace was very well judged. Tasks which are dependent on electronic keyboards prevent pupils from fully realising their composing intentions because their technique is not fluent. The quality of teaching both in Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form is good; pupils' and students' particular abilities are well known and day by day assessment is used systematically to develop their skills. GCE Advanced level lessons are carefully planned to develop students' abilities to undertake increasingly academic work. Instrumental lessons, which involve over 100 pupils, are well taught.

169 Provision for extra-curricular work is very good, and many pupils play demanding repertoire very well. Younger pupils are encouraged to play alongside older, more experienced players and rapidly develop good ensemble technique. The department works hard to provide a wide variety of experience and concerts and other events are well supported.

170 The management of the music department is satisfactory, but lesson planning in Key Stage 3 does not cater fully for pupils' different needs. The scheme of work should be reviewed to ensure an appropriate balance between the use of electronic and acoustic instruments. The assessment system in place for Key Stage 3 is not yet closely aligned with specific achievements within topics. The accommodation, which is scattered, badly sound-proofed and lacks suitable spaces for group work and instrumental teaching, is unsatisfactory and the lack of appropriate storage for orchestral instruments creates a serious hazard in the main teaching room. Provision for music technology is unsatisfactory.

171 There has been little change since the previous inspection. Extra-curricular work continues to be a considerable strength and good standards of attainment in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form have been maintained. Attainment in Key Stage 3 has not improved significantly. The quality of teaching is still inconsistent, and accommodation remains unsatisfactory. Links with primary schools are secure but have not developed to include continuity across the curriculum.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

172 Teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 indicate that the majority of pupils attain at or beyond the national expectation for their age. A significant number are still working towards the national expectation. In this respect standards at the time of the previous inspection have been maintained. There is no data to enable gender comparisons to be made. In lessons, the majority of 14 year olds achieve national age related expectations. There are more girls than boys still working towards the national expectation. All pupils have a secure grasp of the need for appropriate warm-up before physical exercise. In gymnastics most girls display a range of balancing skills and produce appropriate sequences. A significant number have developed competent vaulting skills. Boys' swimming standards are good and the great majority have developed an understanding of the principles and procedures of water-based techniques for life saving.

173 Key Stage 3 pupils from the learning support base receive additional help and support in their swimming lessons and, though many are not yet swimmers, they make good progress in relation to their capabilities.

174 There are no assessment data for the core physical education course in order to ascertain the attainments of 16 year olds in 1999. Nor was it possible to observe Year 11 lessons in this course during the inspection. In lessons, by the end of Year 10, the majority of pupils are on course to achieve national age-related expectations, thus maintaining the standards reported at the last inspection. Only a small number of girls were observed in a mixed lesson, so that meaningful gender comparisons are not possible. All pupils have a good knowledge and understanding of the principles and procedures of warm-up before physical activity and are able to suggest appropriate stretches for different muscle groups. In circuit training some have developed an understanding of how to evaluate their own fitness levels. In team games, such as football, boys' teamwork skills are secure, as is their tactical awareness in small-sided games. Many, including some of the more able players, still lack the ability to look up before passing – this then inhibits their accuracy.

175 Groups of pupils have the opportunity to follow the physical education GCSE course. At the time of the previous inspection the proportion of pupils achieving A* to C grade passes was below the national average for similar schools. In 1997, results were not significantly different from the national average but since then have declined and, in 1999, were well below the national average for similar schools. The small number of girls taking the course does not make meaningful gender comparisons possible. The head of department suggests that the decline in examination results reflects the calibre of the candidates and the difficulties they encounter in successfully completing their coursework project requirements. The department is seeking to find an alternative syllabus for pupils to follow. A scrutiny of present Year 11 pupils' projects indicates that the majority have been able to devise a programme to enable individuals to improve specific skills, for example, accuracy in penalty shooting in football. However, some are less successful in presenting their evaluation of these programmes. There are now fewer unsatisfactory projects than at the time of the previous inspection. This, along with pupils' predicted grades, suggests results should improve.

176 Small groups of students follow the GCE Advanced level physical education course. Overall pass rates since the previous inspection have been maintained but in 1999 there were no higher grade passes. The number of boys and girls varies from year to year thus it is not possible to make realistic comparisons in terms of gender. In lessons, Year 13 students show a good understanding and good use of appropriate terminology as related to anatomy and human physiology and principles of fitness training. They confidently describe physiological changes during training and devise circuit training programmes for specific sporting activities as well as evaluating their effectiveness. A scrutiny of a sample of their theory work indicates that they have a good grasp of the syllabus requirements. Both predicted and target grades suggest that the present cohort will achieve better results than those obtained in 1999.

177 Pupils with special educational needs are well supported and integrated in lessons and make progress in line with their capabilities.

178 The majority of pupils and students respect the ethos within which the subject is taught. They work well together in pairs and small groups and are supportive of one another. They also show respect for the capabilities of one another. Though there are instances of lively chatter in some lessons this does not distract pupils from learning. Pupils' generally positive attitudes and the way they respond to the high expectations of teachers help to create a positive learning atmosphere in lessons.

179 The quality of teaching and learning at Key Stages 3 and 4 is sound. It is never less than satisfactory and in 40 per cent of lessons observed it was good. The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form is good. This is an improvement since the previous inspection when there were shortcomings in teaching at Key Stage 3.

180 The overall planning and structure of lessons is indicative of the teachers' secure knowledge and understanding. Learning objectives are shared with pupils and students at the start thus they are aware of what is expected of them. Tasks and levels of challenge set in most of the practical lessons are well matched to the physical capabilities of pupils, so that all are enabled to make progress. In good quality practical lessons skills are clearly broken down and demonstrated, so that pupils are made further aware of what they have to do to make progress. In a Year 7 swimming lesson, for example, this was effectively done when teaching the techniques of the back crawl. When pupils are fully involved in planning, performing and evaluating, this gives them a greater insight into what they are doing and provides challenge. A group of Year 9 girls, for example, were making good progress in a gymnastics lesson because of this. Similarly, a group of year 11 GCSE pupils were gaining a greater insight into their capabilities by being involved in pair work assessment activities in a table tennis lesson. In other lessons, though, there are insufficient opportunities for pupils to be involved in this respect. Teachers pay due regard to safety and ensure that pupils are warmed up before taking part in physical activity but pupils are rarely given the opportunity to lead this themselves.

181 All teachers successfully convey the expectation that all can have success in practical lessons thus boosting confidence and motivation. At the same time they set high expectations in terms of discipline and behaviour. The provision of a planned and structured variety of activities in both practical and theory lessons ensures that pupils and students stay on task, are encouraged to be productive and work at a good pace. In a Year 13 GCE Advanced level double lesson, for example, the teacher successfully combined theory and practical activities during a lesson on principles of training.

182 As at the time of the previous inspection, non-participants in many practical lessons are not always as fully involved as they should be. Sometimes they are not part of whole group introductions, demonstrations or whole group summative sessions. In a Year 7 rugby lesson, for example, the three non-participants simply stood at the side of the grids. This means they are not fully prepared for participation in the next lesson. Teachers circulate well in practical lessons and effective and timely intervention ensures pupils make progress and understand further what is expected of them. Effective use is made of praise, encouragement and constructive criticism thus ensuring pupils and students are becoming aware of their capabilities. Often, at the end of lessons, evaluation tends to be teachers' comments as opposed to pupils being asked to explain what they think they have learned. Appropriate homework is set and marked for those students following the GCE Advanced level physical education course.

183 Recreational provision for post-16 students is inadequate and few students attend because of the limited range of activities available. The range of extra-curricular activities is narrow and focused mainly on football fixtures. Because of other whole-school responsibilities some members of the physical education department are unable to devote the time they would normally to extra-curricular activities, which then limits the range of activities on offer.

184 The head of department recognises that assessment procedures for the course that all pupils follow, though satisfactory, need development, as do the schemes of work. The department is thus well prepared for the required changes in physical education curriculum and assessment this year. Since the previous inspection the department's focus has been on the improvement of accommodation and during the inspection a new sports hall was handed over. This focus, however, has detracted somewhat from other issues raised in the previous inspection. Whilst, for example, the quality of teaching has improved, there is not yet enough sharing of good practice to raise the sound quality of teaching even further.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

185 The standards being achieved towards the end of Key Stage 3 are above the expectations of Staffordshire's Agreed Syllabus for religious education. Pupils have an above average knowledge and understanding of the religions they study, namely Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. They can compare and contrast similarities and differences well and are able to make use of their previous learning effectively. Results at GCSE for both the full and the short course, and for those following the GCE Advanced level course are also above average. The performance of pupils in the current Years 11 and 13 indicates that high standards are being maintained. There is some difference in the attainment of boys and girls across all years, as reflected nationally. The department is aware of this and is developing a range of strategies to lessen the gap and improve standards yet further.

186 Pupils progress and achieve well at both key stages and in the sixth form. Their knowledge and understanding is good and is used increasingly effectively in providing descriptions and explanations, comparing and contrasting beliefs and practices, and in making links between faith and lifestyle. During the week of the inspection many of the Year 9 pupils met a local Christian sports personality. The girls' groups particularly had prepared searching questions to ask him about the way in which his faith affected his sport. Both boys' and girls' groups responded well to this experience and in plenary discussion showed maturity and insight, reflecting about the implications of religious faith. They develop their discussion and presentation skills well. They are increasingly able to analyse, relate and empathise with the role of religion in the world today. For example, in a Year 12 lesson seen students were able to think critically and yet sympathetically about the nature, reliability and purpose of religious experience through focusing on case studies of individual experiences of the Virgin Mary. Pupils are developing evaluative skills and relate previous learning to new issues as illustrated through a Year 10 GCSE full course lesson seen where pupils considered whether it is possible to be a good Muslim without going to the mosque. They used religious terminology accurately and drew quotations from the Qur'an and Hadith with confidence. They were able to put forward alternative answers to the question well.

187 Higher attaining pupils and those with special educational needs make good progress. Their needs are well known and teaching and materials are well matched to their learning requirements. The department has purchased textbooks specifically designed for lower attaining pupils to complement the general provision. Teachers have worked hard to develop a range of departmentally produced booklets to meet the differing needs of pupils.

188 Pupils respond very well to high levels of challenge engaging closely with their work. For example, a Year 8 girls' group were engrossed in their work on Hindu pilgrimage, completing written tasks with care and taking part in the oral parts of the lesson with enthusiasm. The quality and detail of sixth form files is impressive and indicates real commitment to the subject. There is very little unfinished work in books, homework is completed well and is often detailed, presentation is good and project work is completed with enthusiasm. All this shows that pupils' attitudes to religious education are very positive. Very good relationships and behaviour contribute strongly to the positive learning ethos in all lessons.

189 Teaching is of very high quality. In the majority of lessons seen during the inspection teaching was either good or very good and sometimes excellent. None was unsatisfactory. The teaching team is well qualified, hard working and has a real commitment to the subject and to their pupils.

190 Pupils' positive response and good progress are strongly promoted by the teachers' generally good subject expertise and by their good management of the pupils, which ensures very good behaviour and discipline. Teachers have appropriately high expectations, which results in pupils applying good intellectual effort in their work. For example, in Year 7 pupils were being introduced to a topic on Christian worship. They worked hard, putting forward their own ideas, asking and answering questions and thinking deeply about some of the issues raised. In Year 9 they consider beliefs about God and in a Year 11 short course a unit on religion and the media challenges them to think seriously about media portrayals of moral issues.

191 Teachers' questioning is used very effectively to check knowledge, extend understanding and encourage participation in lessons. For example, in a Year 9 lower attaining boys' group that was observed, the teacher asked very challenging open-ended questions of them about the impact of religious faith on the lives of two people whilst at the same time providing just the right amount of support to ensure understanding. In Year 13 a written question was used effectively for revision purposes, which was then followed up by effective oral questioning to encourage students to reflect on their learning and identify areas for further development. Small group and paired work is used to enable pupils to learn from each other. A range of suitable resources is used during lessons and effective use is made of display materials, both purchased and produced by the pupils.

192 The department's scheme of work is detailed and provides a firm foundation for teacher lesson planning, which is of a good quality. Unit and individual lesson plans do not always, however, overtly focus on the learning outcomes to be achieved with regard to what pupils are to know, understand and be able to do as a result of their religious education experience. Neither do they identify sufficiently the skills which pupils are applying and developing through the work they are engaged in. Lesson planning does, however, provide tasks which are well sequenced and matched to the groups involved and provides a brisk pace for learning to take place.

193 Pupils' involvement and interest in their work is strongly supported by homework being used effectively to extend work in lessons and to prepare for the next stages of learning. Pupils are very keen to do well. Most understand how well they are achieving especially at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, where examination criteria are well used. The department's assessment policy is detailed and used well by teachers to inform pupils of their progress.

194 The religious studies department makes a very strong contribution to the school's provision of opportunities for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its pupils. It does this through the curriculum content, which focuses on matters of religious, spiritual and moral concern and also through the way in which lessons are taught. Pupils are encouraged to think for themselves, share ideas, learn from the teachings and practices of religious traditions by reflecting on the symbolism and significance of them and respect the beliefs and feelings of other people.

195 The department is very well managed and led. The head of department and her team of teachers are committed to encouraging a high profile for religious education within the school and improving standards of attainment yet further. The team works purposefully together. Their work is monitored systematically using school systems. There is a clear development plan for the subject area. Due to recent changes in the school's status the department must move to basing the curriculum on Derbyshire's Agreed Syllabus for religious education. Plans are well in place for doing this. Resources are well matched to the needs of the curriculum. Accommodation is effectively used. The three specialist rooms provide a stimulating and interesting environment in which to learn but the few lessons taught outside this environment are less visually stimulating. Very good progress has been made in all aspects of the department's work since the previous inspection.