

INSPECTION REPORT

NORTHFLEET SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Northfleet

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 118788

Headteacher: Dr Jill Key

Reporting inspector: Michael Owen

22926

Dates of inspection: 29 January – 2 February 2001

Inspection number: 187269

Full inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Modern (non-selective)

School category: Community

Age range of students: 11-18

Gender of students: Girls

School address: Hall Road
Northfleet
Kent

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Appropriate authority: The Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs Sheila Goodayle

Date of previous inspection: 04/03/1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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22926	Michael Owen	Registered inspector	Media studies	What sort of school is it? How high are standards? How well are the students taught? How well is the school led?
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22958	Terry Bailess	Team inspector	English Drama	How good are the curriculum opportunities?
31100	Geoff Hunter	Team inspector	Mathematics	
20243	David Benstock	Team inspector	Science	
31685	Val Girling	Team inspector	Art & design	
22491	Lorraine Small	Team inspector	Design & technology Information and communication technology	
19026	Brian Downes	Team inspector	Geography Special educational needs English as an additional language Equal opportunities	
4773	Peter Gilliat	Team inspector	History	
27666	John Dockrell	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
8139	Barbara Johnstone	Team inspector	Music	
2493	Bill Martin	Team inspector	Physical Education Dance	

18673	Richard Wilkins	Team inspector	Religious Education	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Northfleet School for Girls is an average sized modern school providing education for 958 girls in the 11-18 age range. It is expanding and is oversubscribed. Because of the local education authority's selection policy at 11, the majority of higher attaining girls in the area attend either a grammar school or one of the comprehensive schools. Although attainment on entry has been below average and the social and economic circumstances of many pupils are below or well below average, because of the school's success it has more recently attracted more average and some above average attaining girls from a wider range of social and economic backgrounds. The number of students known to be eligible for free school meals is broadly average. The number for whom English is an additional language is high. There are 196 students from ethnic minorities. The number of students with special educational needs is above average but the proportion with Statements of Special Education Need is below average.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Northfleet School for Girls is a good and effective school. In 1998 and 1999 it won national awards for being one of the ten most improved schools. Because of very good leadership and good teaching the school successfully raises the self-esteem and achievement of all its students. Results compare well with similar schools and are improving. Targets are appropriately challenging. Standards of behaviour are exemplary and relationships are excellent. Taking into account the nature of its intake and the results it achieves, the school provides good value for money and Sixth Form provision is cost-effective.

What the school does well

- Standards have improved significantly over the last 5 years
- Students have a very positive attitude to school and behave very well; they have learnt to respect and value others so that relationships are excellent
- The headteacher and senior staff provide very good leadership
- Teaching and learning are consistently good; there are no unsatisfactory lessons and there is a high proportion of good and very good lessons
- The school takes very good care of its students, ensuring that it celebrates the unique contribution that every student brings

What could be improved

- The consistent use of assessment at subject level to raise achievement further
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support learning in all subjects
- The time available for religious education and the teaching of religious education, which does not match that of other subjects
- The provision of a daily act of collective worship to meet statutory requirements

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made good improvement since it was last inspected in March 1996. Standards have risen, particularly at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form. Teaching and learning have improved significantly. Development planning is better, with professional development tied into key priorities. There is better use of assessment data to set targets and pastoral care is more focused on academic monitoring. Communication is good and accommodation is used more efficiently. There has been some planning for spiritual development but the provision for collective worship still does not fully meet statutory requirements and provision for religious education is now poor.

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
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	D	D	D	C
A-levels/AS-levels	-	-	D	

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

The school's results have improved considerably. Although the Key Stage 3 results in 2000 were unusually well below the national average, taking into account the prior attainment of the students on entry to the school, and comparing their results with similar schools, they were slightly above average in English, just below in mathematics and science. GCSE results in 2000 dipped below the particularly impressive results of the previous two years. As a result the proportions of students achieving 5 A*-C grades and 5 A*-G grades were below average; but the proportion achieving at least 1 A*-G grade was average. The trend in average points scores in English, mathematics and science is above the national trend. The school exceeded its targets and a high proportion of students met or exceeded their predicted grades. In the Sixth Form the average points score for two or more A /AS levels and Advanced GNVQs is below the national average but has risen since the last inspection. Students generally exceed their predicted grades. Completion of vocational courses is above average.

In work seen during the inspection standards overall are higher than the 2000 test and exam scores, reflecting different levels of attainment on entry. At the end of Key Stage 3 they are above average in design and technology, average in English, mathematics, art and design, drama, history, ICT, modern foreign languages, music, physical education, below average in science, geography and well below in religious education. At the end of Key Stage 4 standards are above average in art and design, design and technology and media studies, average in English, drama, history, geography, ICT, modern foreign languages, music, physical education, business and vocational education; they are below average in mathematics and science, well below in religious education. Sixth Form work is well above average in dance, above average in art, drama, media studies and psychology; it is average in English, science, ICT and business and vocational education. The school sets challenging targets and progress is good at all stages.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Students are proud of their school. They want to learn and make the most of the opportunities provided.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. Students are polite, considerate and charming. However, the number of exclusions is above average.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Students are guided to become responsible and mature young women. Relationships are excellent.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Punctuality is good.

Students enjoy coming to school. They are respectful and helpful. They enjoy responsibility and the support that older girls provide to younger ones is very good. Students from different backgrounds relate very well to each other.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Good	Good

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

Teaching in 20 per cent of lessons is very good or excellent. All lessons observed were satisfactory or better. Teaching is good throughout in English and mathematics. In science it is good in Key Stage 3, and satisfactory in Key Stage 4. In other subjects teaching in Key Stage 3 is good in design technology, enrichment and personal and social education, history, geography, ICT, modern foreign languages, music, physical education; it is satisfactory in art and design and drama but unsatisfactory in religious education (though in the week of the inspection it was good). In Key Stage 4 it is very good in dance, good in art and design, design and technology, drama, history, geography, ICT, media studies, business and vocational education, enrichment and personal and social education; it is satisfactory in modern foreign languages, but unsatisfactory in religious education. Teaching of literacy is good; teaching of numeracy is satisfactory. Teaching meets the needs of all students, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language. Overall teaching in the Sixth Form is good.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and manage students very well. As a result learning is good. Students concentrate in lessons and take an interest in their work. Resources are well used but use of ICT is under-developed. Marking is being improved. Although teachers are making good use of assessment data, they are not using it enough to monitor progress in subjects and to involve students in their learning.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good overall. The curriculum is broad and balanced and is adjusted to meet the needs of all students.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Good. Appropriate individual education plans are put in place and all staff are made aware of them so that teaching and learning meets the needs of all students.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Very good. The school and the local education authority provide very good support to ensure that students are quickly integrated into the normal school programme.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good. The personal and social education and enrichment programmes are very good. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory, provision for moral and social development is very good and provision for cultural development is good.
How well the school cares for its students	There are very good procedures for supporting and guiding students and promoting good behaviour.

The school has a good relationship with parents. Most parents have a very positive view of the school.

The curriculum has particular strengths in its provision for performing arts and for enrichment and personal, social and health education. The work-related curriculum is good and meets the needs of many students. Links with primary schools and the community are good. However, provision for religious education is poor and arrangements do not provide fully for statutory requirements.

The school takes very good care of its students, providing exceptionally good support and guidance through difficult personal and family situations. Good procedures for monitoring attainment and progress are ready for further development. Monitoring of attendance and behaviour is very good.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
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Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher makes clear the school's values and future direction and is widely respected. The senior management team works well with each other and all the staff to provide very effective support for teaching and learning.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors make good use of their committee structure to keep the school's progress under constant review and to shape its future direction.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good review processes are in place. Good use is made of value added data though expectations of improvement are not always clearly quantified. Use of data at subject level to raise achievement is not yet fully developed.
The strategic use of resources	Excellent. The school makes the best use of its resources to support its development.

The school has sufficient appropriately qualified staff to teach the curriculum effectively, and to meet the needs of students. Accommodation is adequate and well maintained but the number of temporary classrooms has increased. The quality and range of resources for learning is satisfactory. The school provides good 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"> • Their children like school and are making good progress • Behaviour is good • Teaching is good • They feel comfortable to approach the school questions or a problem • The school expects girls to work hard and achieve their best • The school is well led and managed • The school helps girls to become mature and responsible 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The provision of the right amount of homework • Information about how their children are getting on

The inspection team agrees with the points that please parents. They also agree that provision of homework is not consistent enough. The school provides a good amount of information to parents and is implementing new reporting procedures. However the school could do more to involve parents in the review of Sixth Form students' progress.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

1. Students' attainments on entry to the school are below average. Because of local selection procedures there are few above average students who join in Year 7. Test results indicate that the spread of attainment in each year group varies; in some years it is well below average. Many students live in challenging social and economic circumstances. However, the attainment of students currently in Years 7 to 9 is much closer to average than in the current Years 10 and 11 and in the 1999-2000 Year 11.
2. In 2000 the school's Key Stage 3 assessment results were well below the national average, whereas in the previous years they had been getting closer to the national average. Up until 1999 the trend in improvement had been consistent with the national trend. But the school's analysis of test data on entry of last year's cohort showed that there were fewer above average students in the year group and an exceptionally high number of students with special educational needs. Comparisons with similar schools and achievement based on prior attainment therefore give a fairer picture of standards. By comparison with similar schools both nationally and within Kent, Key Stage 3 results are much closer to average, with results in English better than those in mathematics and science. The school adds value to students' attainments.
3. In 2000 the GCSE results, like the Key Stage 3 results, dipped below the significant improvements of the previous years. As a result the proportion of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades was below the national average for all schools. But based on the average of the last three years it is close to the national average. The proportion achieving 5 or more A*-G grades was below the national average for all schools and the proportion achieving at least 1 A*-G grade was in line. The average points score in 2000 was below the national average. By comparison with similar schools, GCSE results in 2000 were broadly in line with similar schools and the school added value to students' attainments. Results in English, mathematics and science were below the national average. In other subjects the prior attainment levels of students who opt for them often determines results and in some cases, such as design and technology, only relatively small numbers are entered for the examinations. But results were above average in design and technology and history, average in dance, music, physical education and business education and below average in art and design, geography, ICT and modern foreign languages.
4. The overall trend in 5 or more A*-C grades is above the national trend. From 1995-1999 the trend for 5 A*-C grades was significantly above, rising from 10 per cent in 1995 to 44 per cent in 1999. In consequence, the school was given national recognition for being among the 10 most improved schools in the country. The dip to 40 per cent in 2000 was in fact better than predictions based upon the attainment profile of the year group when they entered the school. The trend in 5 or more A*-G grades is above the national trend, again reaching a high point in 1999. The trend in one or more A*-G grades is also upwards. The trend in average points scores is also upwards, rising in 2000 above the school's target; the trend in average points scores in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science is above the national trend for all schools. The school's analysis shows that a high proportion of students achieve or exceed their predicted grades. The school sets itself challenging targets.
5. In the Sixth Form, whilst the average point score of students taking 2 or more A/AS levels and/or Advanced GNVQs is below the national average, there is a significant improvement in the school's average point score since the last inspection. The average point score for students taking 2 A/AS and/or A GNVQs or less is below the national average and below that attained at the time of the previous inspection. But many more students are taking an Advanced GNVQ than at the previous inspection. The school continues to add value to students' attainments in the Sixth Form. The addition of GNVQ qualifications has led to improved overall attainment because the teaching and

learning and assessment styles are a good match to students' needs. Attainment and progress is hindered for some students because of poor attendance.

6. In work seen during the inspection at the end of Key Stage 3 standards overall are higher than those of the 2000 year group. This is because the attainment levels on entry of the current year were higher and students have made good progress. In English and mathematics standards are in line with the national average, in science they are below. Standards are above average in design and technology, average in art and design, drama, history, ICT, modern foreign languages, music, physical education, below average in geography and well below in religious education. In work seen at the end of Key Stage 4 standards were also above those achieved in the 2000 results because the attainment profile of the year group on entry to the school was higher. In English standards are in line with the national average, in mathematics and science they are below. Standards are above average in art, design and technology, and media studies. They are average in drama, history, geography, ICT, modern foreign languages, music, physical education, business and vocational education but well below average in religious education.
7. In the Sixth Form work seen indicated standards that were well above average in dance, above average in art, drama, media studies and psychology. Standards were broadly average in English, science, ICT, business and vocational education. These better standards, which are better than the previous year's results, reflect good teaching and learning and good progress.
8. Overall achievement is good. Because of local selection procedures, the majority of higher attaining students are placed in other schools. But students attending Northfleet School for Girls make good progress from the time they arrive until they leave. Detailed data on progress based on tests of verbal, non-verbal and thinking skills taken in Year 7 indicate that the majority of students reach or exceed their predicted levels and grades at both key stages and in the Sixth Form.
9. At Key Stage 3 achievement is very good in design and technology, good in English, mathematics, history, geography, ICT, modern foreign languages and physical education; it is satisfactory in science, art, music and poor in religious education. At Key Stage 4 achievement is good in English, art, design technology, history, geography, ICT, modern foreign languages, business and vocational education. It is satisfactory in mathematics, science, physical education and poor in religious education. In the Sixth Form the small numbers in many groups mean that judgements about achievement are best made on the basis of individual students' progress. From data based on prior attainment and work seen during the inspection, achievement is good for the majority of students.
10. The good achievement is a direct result of effective teaching and well-planned provision. Because great attention is given to inculcating good attitudes and emphasising high expectations of behaviour, students come to school prepared to learn.

Literacy

11. Standards of attainment in reading and writing are satisfactory for the majority of students. By the end of Key Stage 3 most students use largely correct grammatical structures, appropriate punctuation and correct spelling of basic words. Higher attaining students write fluently, though in some subjects, including religious education and geography, ideas are not developed in extended writing. Progress continues through Key Stage 4, so that by the end of the key stage students take notes effectively write for a variety of audiences. More sophisticated, analytical writing is developed in A level work. Throughout the school, most students take considerable pride in their writing and present work very well.
12. Students enjoy reading. At Key Stage 3, time allowed for private reading in English and the use of reading logs helps them to establish sound habits of wider personal reading. The school library has a good range of titles for this age group, supplemented by class libraries. A bookshop is run at lunchtimes by the English department. The school has also successfully bid for extra funds from industry to buy additional resources and develop extracurricular provision. A computer program supports basic literacy skills and students opt to use this outside lesson time. A successful reading

club operates, and literacy summer schools for pupils who are about to join the school have been held for several years. Annual book weeks are held, together with a 'Family Reading Conference' for students at Key Stage 3. By the end of Key Stage 3 most pupils are secure, independent readers. Higher order, close-reading and analytical skills develop through Key Stage 4, particularly for higher and middle attaining pupils, and in the Sixth Form.

13. Standards of speaking and listening are good. There are many opportunities for developing discussion across the range of subjects, in whole class, paired and small group work. Effective use of questioning also encourages speaking and listening skills in many subjects. Good examples were noted in personal and social education, English and business studies. Whilst pupils sometimes rely too much on colloquial expressions in situations calling for more formal speaking, in general by the end of Key Stage 3 most can express themselves confidently, using appropriate vocabulary. By the end of Key Stage 4 the majority put across their views clearly in discussion. Sixth Form students are clear and confident in speaking, but evidence was sometimes lacking for further development of more wide-ranging and fluent discussions in A level studies. Listening skills are a strength. Students listen to teachers and one another well, showing good respect for others' views. This makes a significant contribution to the quality of learning.

Numeracy

14. Students use mathematics successfully in most areas of the curriculum. There is no subject to which they are denied access through lack of numeracy skills. The use of a computer program is effective in raising numeracy skills for lower attaining students in particular. There are some students, particularly in Years 10 and 11, whose knowledge of multiplication tables is not totally secure.

Information and Communication Technology

15. The standards seen in discrete ICT lessons are in line with national expectations. Students develop a suitably broad range of ICT skills. With the introduction of a new computer network, they are becoming more confident in applying these skills in a more independent way. In design and technology students use ICT to design electronic circuit boards and to control signals such as traffic lights. They use spreadsheets to process information gained from their research. In many subjects they make effective use of the Internet and CD-ROMs. In English students make good use of word processing and desktop publishing. In mathematics students use spreadsheets and databases to underpin the knowledge taught in lessons. In business studies and in history, students used the Internet particularly well to research historical information. ICT is little used in religious education, art and design, science and modern foreign languages.

Special Education Needs

16. Students with special educational needs achieve good standards in relation to their prior attainment and make good progress towards their individual targets. This is especially so where the targets involve improvements in behaviour.

English as an additional language

17. Students for whom English is an additional language make very good progress. Those who are at an early stage of learning English receive a high level of effective from the school and the local authority. This is a significant contributory factor in their success.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

18. As reported at the last inspection, the very good attitudes of the students towards their learning reflects the school's motto: 'Always learning – learning all ways'. The students who were interviewed during the inspection expressed real enthusiasm for their school and said they would recommend it to friends and relations. Students across all year groups enjoy coming to school. They organise

themselves quickly on arrival, settle down to lessons and concentrate well. Students with special educational needs, and those for whom English is an additional language, show very good attitudes to work and behave very well in lessons and around the school.

19. The very good behaviour of the students has a very positive effect on the standards of learning and attainment throughout the school. The students move around in a controlled way, they hold doors open for others and queue sensibly outside classrooms when required to do so. They show respect for the school buildings and there is no graffiti or litter in or around the site. The rates of fixed period and permanent exclusions are higher than reported at the last inspection. This sanction is only used for appropriate reasons and staff work very hard to support students in school as far as possible.
20. The students are courteous and friendly and there are excellent relationships between staff and students. Many students extend their interests and skills in the arts, sport and other areas through the wide range of extracurricular activities offered. These include performances and inter-school sporting competitions. In many lessons students work co-operatively in groups and in physical education students develop social skills through team play. The students actively support charities including the 'Love in a Shoe Box Appeal', the Lion Hospice and Red Nose Day. The majority of the students successfully complete the homework set and they are encouraged to develop their independent learning skills through the use of the learning resource and multimedia centres. When students are given the opportunity to take responsibility in the life of the school they do so very willingly. Older students are trained as mentors to support younger students both academically and personally. Through a commercially sponsored programme six Year 9 students are working as 'tutors' with children in local primary schools. Year 9 students help in the office with administrative duties. The school council, led by the head girl, provides good opportunities for the students to develop citizenship skills and to take responsibility for representing others' views. The very good programme for personal and social education also helps to prepare the students for the responsibilities and opportunities of adult life.
21. The level of attendance continues to be satisfactory, as at the last inspection. Students arrive at school on time and move purposefully between lessons. Consequently little time is wasted and lessons start promptly.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

22. The quality of teaching at both key stages and in the Sixth Form is good. This results in good learning throughout. During the inspection two thirds of lessons were good, very good or excellent. There were no unsatisfactory lessons. This represents a very good improvement from the last inspection.
23. Teaching in English is good throughout. Teachers have very positive relationships with students and keep a close eye on their progress. Teachers' subject expertise is good and they plan interesting and varied lessons that engage the interest of the students, ensuring there is a brisk pace. Students learn well, particularly at Key Stage 3, and want to improve their work. They could be helped further if teachers made them more aware of the criteria for assessing their work so that they are clear about what is needed for improvement. This is not the case in mathematics, where students are more closely involved in assessing their own work. Teaching in mathematics is good at both key stages. Teachers use their expertise well, planning lessons to take account of the needs of the students based on assessment information. This results in students working hard and applying themselves throughout lessons. Teaching in science is good in Key Stage 3, satisfactory in Key Stage 4 and good in the Sixth Form. Teachers' knowledge is good, although there is no specialist physicist in the department. Students behave well and show some interest because of the good way teachers relate to them. But there is a lack of challenge in some lessons, particularly for higher attaining students, who do not become enthused and excited about science. As in English, they are not involved enough in the assessment process.
24. Teaching and learning in other subjects in Key Stage 3 are satisfactory in art and design, and in drama. They are good in design and technology, enrichment and personal and social education, in history, geography, ICT, modern foreign languages, music and physical education. In Key Stage 4

they are satisfactory in modern foreign languages, good in art and design, design and technology, history, geography, media studies and physical education and very good in dance. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in the Sixth Form in vocational courses, good in drama, media studies and music and very good in dance. Although lessons in religious education prepared by the senior management team were well taught during the week of the inspection, other evidence points to unsatisfactory teaching at both key stages and this results in unsatisfactory learning.

25. The majority of teachers have a good grasp of their subject and know how to put it across. They are enthusiastic and enjoy teaching and this contributes to the positive attitudes students have to learning. They give good attention to basic skills and the effect of the focus on literacy in particular is seen in the quality and presentation of students' written work. Lesson planning is generally good, with clear learning outcomes and in consequence students know what they are trying to achieve. Where it is unsatisfactory it does not take enough account of the needs of pupils of different levels of attainment within the same group. Teachers have high expectations of behaviour. The training provided by the school in behaviour management has been very successful in enabling teachers to create a very good climate for learning. As a result, they can concentrate on how to make work interesting and absorbing, because the students do not disrupt lessons. Teachers give good individual support to students; relationships are very positive, promoting confidence and the will to work. In personal and social education and enrichment lessons, very sensitive personal issues are taught in a way that encourages students to act responsibly and show consideration for others. Students feel confident of being able to talk about any aspect of their lives in such a good learning environment.
26. Often skilful and probing questioning takes place, which challenges students to think. This was seen in ICT lessons and, for example in a Year 8 history lesson that resulted in students deepening their understanding of the causes of the Civil War. The last inspection report referred to too much direction and control by teachers, leaving insufficient room for initiative and responsibility in learning. This aspect has improved considerably and as a result of the school's focus on students' preferred learning styles, there is much more variety in the methods used. For example, in a Year 11 media studies lesson, students were well able to work on their assignments in groups all round the school, using expensive equipment in a thoroughly responsible manner. Only occasionally do students find themselves using worksheets that give no opportunity for individual thought or response, or simply carrying out practical instructions without thinking more deeply about what they are doing. By contrast, students in a good Year 9 design and technology lesson worked confidently with construction kits, showing that they had thought about what they were doing and understood how they could use a computer to control the motorized movements of a device.
27. Teachers make good use of available resources, although there is some way to go before all of them will be making the best use of ICT. In general students do not use ICT enough to support their learning. But in geography teachers make good use of the Internet, videos, satellite and aerial photographs as well as maps, diagrams and books. The dance teacher makes good use of a video camera to help students evaluate their performance. Good display is seen in most rooms, stimulating interest, celebrating good work and providing a good reminder about correct English.
28. The school is working to improve the rather variable quality of marking. The best marking makes clear to students what is needed to take the next step to improve. This ties in with the need to develop assessment procedures further. The good data provided by the school on each student's attainment levels and potential is put alongside teachers' own assessment of students to provide a picture of each student's potential, so that progress can be measured. However, teachers are only just beginning to move from this general information to identifying subject specific targets. There is good practice in some subjects, such as mathematics and geography. In these instances students are involved sufficiently in the assessment process to enable them to understand where they have got to in their learning, where they need to go to and the steps towards the goal. It is this ownership of learning that is not developed strongly enough in all subjects to help students to acquire the tools that will enable them to continue their learning throughout their lives.

29. Homework is clearly an important part of learning beyond the classroom. Parents expressed some concerns about this and inspectors found some evidence of inconsistencies in practice. Students' contact books reveal gaps when work should have been set but was not. In science students are often told simply to finish off work. In modern foreign languages there are good examples but the homework timetable is not always observed and some homework lacks sufficient challenge. However, in geography, assignments were planned to extend learning and to take students forward.
30. In the majority of lessons seen in the Sixth Form teaching and learning are good. There is a good range of teaching strategies. Students learn by practical activities and resources are up to date and relevant. Teachers are well prepared, lessons are well planned, and expectations are high. Teachers are enthusiastic and give good individual support. However not all lessons have clear learning objectives and some lessons are too dominated by the teacher, with little opportunity for students to extend their thinking or put their views forward.
31. Good practice in teaching literacy skills is evident in most subjects. Some subjects, amongst others art and design, music and science, provide glossaries of specialist words which help to reinforce correct spelling and promote an interest in language. Imaginative displays of key words and students' written work around the school and in many subject departments, including English, modern foreign languages, mathematics and history, serve to create a rich literacy environment. In most subjects, students read from a range of texts, with an increasing emphasis on developing research skills through the use of the Internet and CD-ROMs. Students are also given regular opportunities to write for different purposes. Note-making and report writing are required in most subjects. Teachers mark written work to a common policy, which requires spelling corrections. Additional support for the development of literacy skills for pupils with special educational needs is good.
32. The teaching of numeracy has improved. Numerical skills are well taught in mathematics lessons and in a number of subjects. In a GCSE child development lesson, for example, students were asked to produce a mathematical game for pre-school children. This enhanced their own understanding of number. A business education lesson for 16-year-old students dealing with costs and benefits provided an opportunity for the students to apply their number skills in a practical context. Science offers good opportunities for students to make sense of information presented in numerical and graphical forms. Art and design enhances their understanding of symmetry, scale and geometric shapes. Work has begun on producing a whole school approach to the teaching of numerical skills. When completed this will enhance what is currently good work by ensuring greater cohesion and improved sharing of good practice.
33. Teaching of students with special educational needs is good. Teachers plan carefully to provide a good range of work tailored to the individual needs of students. Teachers and classroom assistants work together well and this contributes to raising standards. The learning support department gives good support in preparing teaching materials for use with students with special educational needs. Individual education plans are good and contain well-focussed targets. There are good formal and informal procedures for discussion about special educational needs, so that students are well known to staff.
34. Overall, teaching is very good for students for whom English is an additional language. A large number of staff have undertaken extra training which they have then used to brief other staff. The local education authority provides very good support in training and preparing lessons for these students and in visiting frequently to give advice.

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

35. The school takes considerable care to identify and take into account the needs of individual students and groups of students in planning the curriculum. This applies especially to the range of subject options at Key Stage 4, which are reconsidered each year in the light of student achievement, and in arrangements to allow individual choice in the Sixth Form. As a result, the curriculum is broad, balanced and relevant to the needs of students. The quality and range of learning opportunities are good throughout the school. There are particular strengths in the very good programmes for personal, social and health education and for careers education. Strategies for teaching literacy skills are very effective. Students' learning opportunities are also enriched by very good extracurricular activities. Teaching and support staff work hard to make sure that students have full equality of access and opportunity to available courses and activities. The governing body's curriculum committee has a good overview of all aspects of the curriculum, and takes a close interest in standards achieved.
36. The requirements of the National Curriculum are met. But the time allowed for religious education, although it has been increased since the last inspection, remains inadequate for secure delivery of the locally agreed syllabus. There is also no provision for teaching religious education in the Sixth Form, although elements of the subject are taught through personal and social education. As a result, statutory requirements for the subject are not fully met. Good school assemblies containing an element of worship are held regularly, but there is not a *daily* act of collective worship for all students. These gaps were noted in the last inspection report. In all other respects the school has made good progress in improving overall curriculum provision.
37. At Key Stage 3 students follow a broad foundation course that includes all National Curriculum subjects. In addition, dance and drama are taught as separate subjects and there is a very good programme for enrichment and personal and social education. ICT provision in discrete lessons is good but in other subjects it is inconsistent. Provision for modern foreign languages, a weakness at the last inspection, is now good and includes three languages. Almost all students have the opportunity to study two languages during the key stage. Lower attaining pupils follow a language awareness course in addition to French. At this stage, the design and technology course is integrated, and students investigate common themes through a number of different specialist areas including food, electronics and resistant materials. The scheme of work provides good coverage of the National Curriculum programmes of study. The time given for teaching religious education is unsatisfactory and does not allow the Agreed Syllabus to be studied in the breadth and depth necessary for satisfactory standards to be reached.
38. At Key Stage 4, students like the good range of courses available. They feel they get good advice when choosing subject options and understanding their implications for future careers. All students study English language and literature, mathematics, at least one modern foreign language and science. They also follow a short course in ICT. Students have an appropriate choice from three further option groups, as well as courses in personal and social education, physical education and careers. Good provision is made for one week of work experience at the beginning of Year 11. The school has made thoughtful and effective use of the new flexibility that allows some students to vary National Curriculum requirements, in the light of their individual needs. Some students in Year 10 follow an appropriate new course in work-related education, which includes some tuition at the local college of further education. Others choose a GNVQ qualification in retail and distribution instead of a modern foreign language or technology. Increased provision for food technology and the introduction of a new GCSE in textiles will ensure that the design technology requirements are fully met. The time given for religious education at Key Stage 4 continues to be inadequate. The use of five study conferences during the year is inappropriate for delivering the Agreed Syllabus.
39. Since the last inspection the school has widened Sixth Form provision with the addition of GNVQs at intermediate and advanced levels and new advanced subsidiary (AS) courses. The new AS courses are allowing students to study a broad range of qualifications in line with their future aspirations, for example, AS accounting and AS law. In Year 12 the majority are following at least three AS programmes, an advanced vocational certificate of education (AVCE) or a combination of both, in addition to the three key skills of communication, application of number and ICT. A small minority is following four AS levels. Good provision is made for individual students in a flexible

manner. Students are well supported with a mentor, a senior member of staff who works with them on an individual action plan and reviews progress. They follow a good core programme of personal and social education and careers education, including two weeks of work experience. There is, however, no provision for teaching religious education as a discrete subject. There is also no planned recreational sports programme, though during the inspection students themselves expressed a wish for this.

40. Curriculum arrangements provide good access for students with special educational needs, and there is very good provision for those for whom English is an additional language.
41. Strategies for teaching literacy skills are very good. There has been regular staff training, and good practice for developing literacy skills is evident in most subjects across the curriculum. The literacy working group has representatives from each faculty, who ensure that proposals are discussed by staff as a whole before they are implemented. Each subject department works to a centrally co-ordinated literacy checklist, and considers whether texts used with students are at an appropriate standard of clarity and readability. Writing and thinking frames have also been created to help students develop and structure different types of written work effectively.
42. A start has been made with plans for a whole school approach to the teaching of numeracy. Extra numeracy activities are currently given to Year 7 students during registration periods from packs prepared by the numeracy co-ordinator.
43. The provision for extracurricular activities is very good. There is a good range of clubs and activities in a variety of traditional sports. Inter-school fixtures are arranged and some teams compete in area and county tournaments. There are good links with the local sports centre and some sports clubs. English and drama teachers arrange theatre visits, and there are major school productions organised by the performing arts faculty every two years. There is also a good range of music activities, including school choir and orchestra. Many other subjects hold worthwhile lunchtime or after school clubs and activities, including extra tuition sessions. A useful homework club is available. The cyber cafe is a popular and successful feature. The school has a number of enriching international contacts, including exchanges with a secondary school at Cambrai in France, visits to Germany and links with Japan.
44. There is excellent equality of access and opportunity for all students. Great care is taken to ensure that students are placed in appropriate groups on entry to the school. In Year 10, when students start on their option courses, the school works very hard to ensure that all students choose well and are placed in courses that meet their needs. There is an above average number of students for whom English is an additional language including students who are refugees. Teachers have undertaken extra training to meet the needs of these students and as a result they are integrated well into the school and make rapid progress. All staff are committed to equality of opportunity for all students.
45. The enrichment and personal and social education (PSE) programmes are a strong feature of the curriculum. They have a high profile within the school and are an integral part of the school's ethos. Good schemes of work make good provision for each year group. The programme is well planned to prepare students for adult life and includes guidance on health issues, including drugs and sex education. There are strong links between PSE, enrichment lessons and the tutor education programme. They ensure that a wide range of skills and knowledge is taught. The school works closely and effectively with the Youth Crime Reduction Officer and other specialists. The subjects have a positive impact on the welfare and care of students and on the attitudes and relationships within the school. They make a good contribution to students' social and moral education and to developing students' speaking and listening skills.
46. Careers education and guidance in the school is very good. There is a structured programme from Year 8, which includes a sound focus on job application and interview skills. The careers library is well-stocked and attractively presented. The careers department also works closely with the local careers service. Advisers visit the school regularly to support students. School careers conventions

are organised each year, and are well attended by a good selection of local and national employers. Industry 'taster' days are arranged. The school's well-organised programme for work experience in Years 11 and 12 also forms an integral part of careers education. This is particularly valuable in the Sixth Form, where work experience is accredited by the universities of Kent and Greenwich and by Christchurch College, Canterbury.

47. The wider community makes a good contribution to students' learning. Visits in the locality often provide a fertile source of enrichment to support study. For example there are effective displays around the school about a mathematics project based on the Bluewater shopping centre. Performances by GCSE drama groups have also taken place there. All Year 10 students take part in a wide-ranging Community Action Programme, supported by business funding. Placements are in local primary schools, residential and nursing homes and on environmental schemes. Special artistic or construction projects form part of the programme. There are also close links with the local Education Business Partnership, which provides placements for teachers to gain experience of business and industry.
48. Links with partner organisations are good, and particularly strong with local primary schools. There are extensive consultations with Key Stage 2 teachers about those who are about to join the school. Staff see lessons in each other's schools. Curriculum planning for the transition to secondary school has improved since the last inspection as a consequence. All mathematics teachers have been trained in the strategies used in the numeracy hour in primary schools. English teachers have visited primary schools to observe literacy hours. The school's community education programme is a particularly strong feature. Primary school pupils come into the school with other members of their family to experience a range of learning activities, enjoyable for their own sake but also good preparation for coming to the school. Links with Sixth Forms in the grammar and high schools in Gravesham will be developed more systematically from September onwards, with greater opportunities for sharing access to advanced level courses.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Education

49. The overall provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good.
50. The provision for students' spiritual development is satisfactory. Assemblies enable students to reflect on matters that are important in their lives. For example, students in a Year 11 and 12 assembly were asked to think about the things that they would need to take on a journey. Reference was made to a Bible story told by Jesus. Students were told that during a journey they could use their ears and eyes to contemplate and appreciate the world around them. However, the lack of a daily act of collective worship for all students reduces opportunities for raising spiritual awareness. The previous inspection report stated that the school should plan a whole school approach to spiritual development. There has been some attempt to address this issue but more could be done. There is very good provision in geography, where students are given the opportunity to reflect on the environment and on the power of nature. However, there is no planned provision for developing students' spiritual awareness in some subjects, such as science.
51. The provision for students' moral development is very good. Students are taught the difference between right and wrong. Honesty, fairness and respect for truth are promoted well. There is good provision for discussion of moral issues in enrichment lessons and personal and social education. The staff are good role models for pupils. The previous inspection report identified the need for more exploration of the wider dimension of moral issues. The school has successfully addressed this.
52. The provision for students' social development is very good. The school provides a range of opportunities to promote social interaction; for example, students to work together in groups in many lessons. Extracurricular provision offers further opportunities, particularly in physical education, performing arts and in school productions. Older students act as academic and pastoral mentors to younger students. Responsibility is given to students to be form captains and to be involved in running activities. The school council, which is organised by Sixth Form students,

enables students to offer their opinions about school matters. There are many opportunities for students to work in the community, including environmental projects.

53. The provision for students' cultural development is good. This is an improvement since the previous inspection. Visits to museums and art galleries take place. There are exchange visits to France and Germany. Students are given experiences to enrich their understanding of other cultures, for example looking at African myths in drama, enjoying a French breakfast on Bastille Day and learning about the Anglo-Indian heritage, including work on the origins of Sikhism. Students have the opportunity to think about the issues concerning asylum seekers and refugees. In a school assembly a Kosovan refugee spoke about her experiences.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

54. Overall, the very good support and guidance provided by the school contributes significantly to raising achievement. Procedures to ensure students' welfare, health and safety are good. As reported at the last inspection the quality of pastoral care is a very strong feature of the school. All of the students interviewed expressed confidence that there are sympathetic adults to whom they can go with problems. The school employs a very well regarded family worker who works closely with the pastoral team and outside agencies to support the students and their families, if necessary.
55. The very good pastoral system is very well organised through form tutors, heads of year and the learning managers. They play crucial roles in monitoring both personal development and supporting academic progress. Through the excellent relationships between staff and students any concerns are picked up very quickly and support strategies are put in place depending on individual needs. Learning consultation days give form tutors and students an opportunity to discuss both personal and academic progress.
56. The school shows a high level of care for students with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language. There are very good assessment procedures for tracking their attainment and progress. This enables new targets to be set and contributes to raising standards.
57. The school has an appropriate health and safety policy. Risk assessments and health and safety checks take place regularly and are reported to the governors' environment committee. However, the some toilets are in need of refurbishment and the changing facilities and the lack of showers for physical education are unsatisfactory. There are suitable arrangements in place for first aid and medical support, including staff with the required first aid qualifications. The enterprising school catering manager and her staff provide a wide variety of very nutritious and attractive food. The civilized arrangements for serving breakfast and lunch contribute greatly to the students' social development. The school has very good arrangements in place for child protection issues. The family worker is the named responsible person and he trains all members of staff in child protection procedures.
58. There are very good procedures in place for monitoring and improving attendance. The registers are checked by the heads of year and the school receives weekly visits from the education welfare officer. Certificates are awarded to individuals and tutor groups with the highest attendance and staff work very hard to ensure that all students are motivated to want to be in school and to learn.
59. The procedures for monitoring and promoting positive behaviour are excellent. A system of rewards and sanctions is in place, which is used consistently by all staff and communicated effectively to the students. All staff are trained in behaviour management by the family worker to ensure that there is a consistent approach throughout the school. Through the inclusion centre the school works with students who have problems controlling their emotions and behaviour. The school promotes an ethos of mutual respect and tolerance. Students were in agreement that bullying is not an issue in the school but any bullying is tackled sensitively and firmly by staff. The very good provision for personal and social education includes well planned opportunities to discuss behaviour and to

promote high standards. Parents are happy that the school is encouraging their children to become mature and responsible.

Assessment

60. The school's overall procedures for assessing students' attainment and achievement are good. Extensive use is made of verbal, non-verbal and cognitive ability tests to establish each student's potential, to monitor their progress and evaluate achievement. The information is entered onto the school database and disseminated to heads of department. As students progress through the school, further tests include reading age assessments, numeracy and literacy tests and national tests and examinations in all subjects. Good use is made of ICT to centralise and co-ordinate results. However, practice within departments varies. In geography, assessment procedures are very good, with moderated assessment across the years in both key stages and clear links to National Curriculum levels. Procedures are also good in English, history, and modern foreign languages. But in religious education they are unsatisfactory, with assessment bearing no relation to a grading system or to the agreed syllabus. There are good individual education plans for students with special educational needs. Parents usually attend annual reviews and the school maintains good formal and informal contacts with them.
61. The use made of assessment information in planning the curriculum is satisfactory overall. The headteacher provides a useful analysis of the test data as the basis for predicting each student's future attainment. This facilitates realistic target setting and an evaluation of actual achievement against prior attainment. Good adjustments have been made to the curriculum for particular year groups to take account of their attainment levels. However, within subject areas and among tutors, there is some lack of consistency in the use of the data to monitor systematically students' progress and set individual subject targets to raise achievement further. Good practice is firmly established in geography and art and design, where discussions with students, identification of underachievement and adjustment of curriculum plans are good features. Elsewhere there are varying degrees of effective use. In religious education it is unsatisfactory. In general, national data is better used at senior management level than at departmental level, where subjects are not always clear about how to use data to compare their results with national standards and measure achievement by comparison with similar schools.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

62. The school has a good relationship with parents and this helps to promote the quality of learning. Although there was a low response to both the pre-inspection questionnaire and meeting, parents and carers expressed a positive view of the school. A very high proportion of parents would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or problems. There is a small proportion of parents who do not feel they are well informed about how their children are getting on. Inevitably, communications to parents via teenage students do not always reach their intended destination. But the school does provide a good variety of opportunities for parents to discuss and see the progress their children are making. The annual reports to parents are satisfactory. However, there is an inconsistency in the quality of the information about student achievement in annual reports and some of the targets are not specific enough to secure and sustain improvement. The school has recognised this and a new format has been brought into use this year. Parents receive invitations to open evenings, to parent/teacher consultations and to learning consultation days. Although regular reports are provided on the progress their children are making in the Sixth Form, parents are not invited into school to meet teachers to discuss progress and this is a point for improvement.
63. The school provides very good information in the prospectus and in attractive newsletters. Parents are invited to information evenings on health issues, post-16 education, careers and Key Stage 4 option choices. Such information enables parents to understand better what their children are being taught. Parents are involved in family learning days and in the community education programme, which links with local primary school children and their families. As part of Book Week a family reading conference was held in school. These links make a positive contribution to students' attitudes and learning.

64. Some parents do not feel that their children get the right amount of homework. The inspection team recognises that there are inconsistencies that need to be addressed. However, most teachers regularly set and mark relevant and satisfactory amounts of homework. Form tutors and heads of year monitor this through the contact books. Where homework is completed and parents are supporting their children, this has a positive impact on the quality of learning.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

65. Leadership and management are very good. The headteacher provides very good leadership. She is widely respected because she articulates the school's vision in a convincing manner and has won the confidence of staff, students, governors and parents. She makes very clear what is expected of all those involved in the school and she provides every support to ensure that these expectations are met. In consequence teaching and learning in the school are good. The vision of the school becoming a specialist performing arts college is being pursued with determination and imagination. This is a very appropriate goal, understood and supported with enthusiasm by the governors and staff.

66. The headteacher is ably supported by a senior management team that works together well, leading by example and complementing each other's expertise. They work effectively with staff to ensure that learning is well supported. For example, the very well planned behaviour management training given to all staff and the importance afforded to personal, social and health education results in students having a very good attitude to the school, behaving well and wanting to learn. The excellent relationships that pervade the school begin at the top.

67. Since the previous inspection the process of planning for improvement has become more effective, providing opportunity for all staff and other stakeholders to contribute to the identification of priorities and enabling annual adjustments to be made. While appropriate priorities are identified and the processes for achieving them are made clear, the planned outcomes are not always sufficiently quantified so that monitoring of progress can have more rigour.

68. The management structure is being developed in an appropriate manner to take account of the school's expansion. It provides good support to learning throughout the school and aims to eliminate any barriers to learning. Roles and lines of communication are clear. The recently appointed learning managers for each key stage are working well with tutors to strengthen their monitoring of students' academic progress, alongside their very good behaviour management. The appointment of a full-time family worker was a very good strategic decision. It has brought major benefits to teaching and learning and strengthened home-school links. Since there is a feeling that the faculty structure serves a limited purpose, it is appropriate that the school is reviewing its arrangements at middle management level. Heads of department lead and manage their departments well and in consequence all staff are very committed to a process of continuous improvement. Department development plans are linked to whole school plans, but they too do not always identify specific measurable outcomes. Good training of middle managers has taken place to strengthen their accountability for raising standards.

69. Good arrangements are in place for regular monitoring of teaching. Areas for staff development are identified through this process and feed into the school improvement plan. Both senior management and heads of department are involved and are developing greater confidence in identifying areas for improvement and taking action to secure further improvements in teaching and learning. Use of data is very focused and results in good target setting and effective overall monitoring of progress. However, more use could be made of national data at subject level so that subjects are comparing the amount of value they are adding to the amount being added by similar schools. The next step is to translate this information into realistic but challenging subject targets for each student. This can then be shared with them so that students are even clearer about expectations and the routes to success.

70. Governors make good use of their committee structure to keep the school's progress under constant review and to shape its future direction. While providing good support they also ask searching questions to challenge decisions and to focus on their impact on the quality of teaching and learning. They visit the school to see for themselves as well as receiving reports. In consequence they have a good knowledge of its strengths and weaknesses and are prepared to initiate and support appropriate action to secure improvements. However they have not yet ensured that statutory provision for collective worship is fully in place.
71. The very good support for students with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language is co-ordinated by the head of learning support. Her leadership is very good and with the support of the senior management team she ensures that individual education plans are well prepared and that staff are aware of them. She also works well with the learning support assistants so that their contribution to learning needs is effective. A very effective link governor ensures that all delegated funds for special educational needs are used efficiently. There are good contacts with local authority services. All statutory requirements are met.

Efficiency

72. As reported at the time of the last inspection the school manages its delegated budget in a very efficient way. A reasonable level of budget surplus that also acts as a reserve is carried forward. Funding is satisfactory, in line with the average nationally. The bursar works very closely with the headteacher to ensure that the resources are used wisely. Future plans are carefully budgeted based on priorities decided with staff and governors in the development plan. Together with the governors the school successfully applies to its use of resources the principles of best value – comparison, challenge, consultation and competition. This goes for both purchasing decisions and the follow-up to ensure value for money in learning outcomes. Good use is made of grants. The school has a good entrepreneurial approach and is successful in obtaining additional funding for various initiatives. Examples are Education Extra, which was spent on literacy resources, and funds from the National Grid for Learning (NGFL) Global Citizenship Project.
73. The staffing cost of the Sixth Form is marginally higher than the budget but without noticeable effect on standards in Key Stage 4. The school is currently working on a consortium arrangement with other local schools to ensure that the Sixth Form remains efficient but still meets the needs and aspirations of the students. Many students have benefited from the strong learning support and continuity provided by the Sixth Form and this has enabled them to achieve success. For example, the majority of GNVQ health and social care students are now at university and some are studying to be midwives and teachers.

Staffing

74. The school has sufficient appropriately qualified staff to teach the curriculum effectively and to meet the needs of students, including those with special education needs and those for whom English is a second language. The high proportion of very experienced teachers and the low turnover of staff ensure continuity of experience for students. There is a very strong team ethos within the staff, underpinned by a shared commitment to the school's values and aims. This has a positive impact on all areas of its life and work.
75. The school is well served by its non-teaching staff, who provide very good support for students, teachers, parents and governors. There is a very effective programme for newly qualified teachers and staff new to the school. The school has successfully addressed the issues of the previous report concerning staff development, which is now well related to whole school planning.

Accommodation

76. The school has sufficient accommodation for all subjects to be taught. Specialist accommodation is adequate for the delivery of the curriculum in most subjects, although in science the need to move

equipment between temporary buildings has an adverse effect on the quality of teaching and learning. The changing rooms and showering arrangements for physical education and performing arts and the condition of some of the girls' toilets are unsatisfactory.

77. The buildings are well maintained and high quality display enlivens the learning environment. There are very high standards of cleanliness throughout the school and the students treat the buildings with respect. The school has extensive fields and grounds, including an environmental area, orchard and pond, which are used well to enhance the curriculum.
78. Deficiencies identified at the time of the last inspection have been addressed. Additional rooms have been provided for design and technology; apart from mathematics all departments have appropriately suited rooms; insulation and double glazing have been installed with the exception of the south wing; and there is a rolling programme of redecoration.
79. There has, however, been a significant increase in the number of temporary or mobile classrooms on the school's site; up to nineteen from five in 1996. Plans for a new science block are awaiting final approval and an application for Arts College status has received backing from the local education authority. There are also plans for new accommodation for design and technology. Nevertheless there is still a need to review the overall provision of teaching space in the light of the school's increasing roll.

Resources for Learning

80. The overall quality and range of resources to support and enhance teaching and students' learning across the curriculum is satisfactory. There is a good range of equipment for physical education. Resources are satisfactory overall for the teaching of English. There have been useful additions in class libraries and for the Reading Club, which is a strong feature of the school. The design and technology department has old computers that create problems for the teaching of control technology. The art and design department has a good range of books and posters but there is unsatisfactory computer software to support the teaching of art and design and science, and this reduces the range of students' learning experiences. Since the last inspection the learning resource manager has updated and replenished the stock of fiction books in the learning resource centre. There is now a good choice of fiction books for Key Stage 3 and new stock has recently been purchased for Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form. The multimedia centre is well organised. Students from all year groups have access to both centres throughout the day. The number of computers available to students has increased since the last inspection.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

81. In order to raise further the standards of attainment and achievement, the governors, headteacher and staff should continue to work together to:-

- (1) Use assessment more consistently at department level, including marking, analysis of school and national data, the identification of subject specific targets for teachers and students and the involvement of students more closely in the process* (*paragraphs 60,61,69*);
- (2) Extend provision for ICT so that students learn to use ICT to support all areas of their learning* (*paragraphs 15,27*);
- (3) Improve provision for religious education by increasing the time available and improving standards of teaching to match those found in other subjects (*paragraphs 36,39,193,194,196,197*);
- (4) Consider how the statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship might be met (*paragraph 36,50*).

82. In addition to these key issues, the governors should consider addressing the following matters in their action plan:

Ensure that improvement plans at school and department level include quantifiable outcomes where possible (*paragraph 68*); continue to strengthen the impact of monitoring of teaching and learning by identifying more specific issues for improvement (*paragraph 69*); involve parents more closely in 6th Form consultations (*paragraph 62*); do more to ensure that appropriate homework is set on a regular basis for all students (*paragraph 29, 64*); improve changing rooms and showering arrangements for physical education and performing arts and the condition of some of the girls' toilets (*paragraph 78*).
Items marked with an asterisk () are included in the school's existing improvement plan.*

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	163
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	53

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
2	18	48	32	0	0	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 students

Students on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth Form
Number of students on the school's roll	868	90
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	150	

Special educational needs

	Y7– Y11	Sixth Form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	10	
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	309	1

English as an additional language

	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	183

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	21
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	30

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.3

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.9

National comparative data	5.9
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National comparative data	0.4
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Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Girls	Total
	9	163	163

<i>National Curriculum Test/Task Results</i>		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Girls	100	84	72
	Total	100	84	72
Percentage of students	School	61 (70)	52 (64)	44 (50)
at NC level 5 or above	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of students	School	21 (9)	25 (28)	9 (7)
at NC level 6 or above	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Girls	95	97	74
	Total	95	97	74
Percentage of students	School	58 (53)	59 (57)	45 (60)
at NC level 5 or above	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of students	School	13 (11)	30 (25)	6 (19)
at NC level 6 or above	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Girls	Total
	2000	153	153

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Girls	60	135	148
	Total	60	135	148
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	39 (43)	88 (88)	97 (98)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	34
	National	38.4

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 students who achieved all those they studied	School	14	57.1
	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	Girls	Total
	2000	23	23

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	N/a	11.7	11.7	N/a	0.9	0.9
National	17.7	18.6	18.2	2.6	2.9	2.7

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 students who achieved all those they studied	School	41	59
	National		N/a

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	4
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	0
Indian	151
Pakistani	8
Bangladeshi	11
Chinese	2
White	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	7	
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	37	2
Other minority ethnic groups	44	2

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7– Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	56.3
Number of students per qualified teacher	17

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	22
Total aggregate hours worked per week	441

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	79.9
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Average teaching group size: Y7– Y11

Key Stage 3	21.7
Key Stage 4	20.1

	£
Total income	2286955
Total expenditure	2284710
Expenditure per pupil	2403
Balance brought forward from previous year	26400
Balance carried forward to next year	28645

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

951

Number of questionnaires returned

301

Percentage of responses in each category

My child likes school.

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	45	49	5	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	50	47	2	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	36	54	4	1	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	29	55	13	2	2
The teaching is good.	38	56	1	1	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	37	51	11	1	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	53	40	5	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	65	33	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	34	55	7	2	3
The school is well led and managed.	49	45	3	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	46	48	4	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	33	52	5	2	8

My child is making good progress in school.

Behaviour in the school is good.

My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.

The teaching is good.

I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.

I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.

The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.

The school works closely with parents.

The school is well led and managed.

The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.

The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.

Other issues raised by parents

No other significant matters were raised by parents at the parents' meeting or by letter.

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

ENGLISH

83. The profile of attainment in English when students enter the school is below the national average. But in 2000, the results of the national tests taken at the end of Key Stage 3 were in line with the national average for students reaching level 5 and above, the expected level. They were above average for similar schools. At the higher levels, level 6 and above, results were also close to the national average and above average for students in similar schools. Over a three-year period, results have improved at level 5 though they have fallen slightly at the higher levels. Overall results, based on average points scores in the tests, remain below the national average, however. The highest attaining students in the area are selected for local grammar schools, and this inevitably lowers average levels of attainment in the school. Students gained better results in English than in mathematics or science. This reflects a national trend.
84. At the end of Key Stage 4 in 2000, the proportion of A*-C grades in GCSE English was slightly below the national average, but above the average for similar schools. The results at higher grades in English literature were well below the national average, but in line with the average for similar schools. All students in the school are entered for the literature examination. In most schools, only higher attaining pupils are given this opportunity. In both subjects, all students gained passes at A*-G grades, which is above the national average. The proportion of students gaining higher grade passes has improved gradually over the last three years in English, but has fallen slightly in English literature. In the Sixth Form, all students gained passes at grades A-E in the A level English examination in 2000. There has been a 100 per cent success rate in the examination for the past three years. Small numbers of students opt to take the subject at this level, though numbers are higher in the current Years 12 and 13. Few drop out before the end of the course.
85. Given that standards in English on entry to the school are below average, achievement by individual students is good at Key Stage 3. In 2000, the school's value-added analyses of Key Stage 3 test results show that the majority of students make above average rates of progress. Achievement is also good at Key Stage 4. Students make above average progress compared with others nationally who start their GCSE course at broadly the same level of attainment. In the Sixth Form, students again achieve well. Most build on their work at GCSE successfully to achieve realistic target grades at A level. Students with special educational needs also make good progress throughout the school. They are well supported by special needs staff and clearly benefit from the help provided. At Key Stage 4 in 2000, all students gained at least a G grade pass in both English and in English literature. This represents a good level of achievement for many.
86. Students' attitudes are good. They pay close attention to teachers and are clearly interested and engaged by tasks set. Teachers, in turn, emphasise the need to respect others and to listen carefully to views expressed. As a result, listening skills are very good throughout the school. Students are also willing to make constructive contributions to discussions in a range of contexts, including whole class, paired and small group work. Speaking skills are good.
87. In work seen during the inspection standards are satisfactory overall at both key stages and in the Sixth Form. However, speaking and listening standards are good. In Key Stage 3 Year 9 students co-operated well in small group discussions to share and develop ideas about the main characters and events in the play 'Macbeth'. They were able to summarise and present their conclusions succinctly in feedback to the whole class. At Key Stage 4, students across the ability range speak clearly and are keen to express opinions. One Year 11 group contributed particularly well to a whole class discussion on the poem 'One Flesh' by Elizabeth Jennings. They showed some insight into the meaning of the poem and were able to express understanding and sympathy with the subtleties of emotion explored by the poet. In the Sixth

Form, A level students are well-motivated and show good levels of interest in class discussion of literary texts. They give effective seminar presentations, based on their research. They appear less confident in developing and sustaining more spontaneous discussion. But, they generally express their ideas articulately and understand the need to support them by relevant textual reference.

88. Standards of reading are satisfactory. Throughout the school, students are given the opportunity to study a range of high quality literature by major authors, poets and dramatists. At Key Stage 3, time allowed for private reading and the use of reading logs help to establish sound habits of wider personal reading. There is a good range of fiction for this age group in the school library, supplemented by class libraries. Students use the computer based reading programme, which helps to develop and reinforce basic skills. By the end of the key stage, the great majority of students are secure, independent readers. Most are beginning to come to grips effectively with written evaluations of texts studied in class. At Key Stage 4, reading skills are developed further through the study of novels, plays and poetry in preparation for the GCSE. Higher order, close-reading skills could be more fully developed in higher and middle attaining students, however. In the Sixth Form, A level students have developed their insight into character and theme in plays and novels studied, showing a sound understanding of meaning beyond the literal.
89. Standards of written work are satisfactory. At Key Stage 3, students write for a range of purposes and audiences: narrative essays, poems, autobiography, letters and writing for information. More extended personal and creative writing is a strength, with imaginative use of vocabulary and appropriate development of ideas evident in the work of higher and middle attaining pupils. Errors in spelling and punctuation are a weakness for many middle and lower attaining students. Teachers emphasise the importance of accuracy and use a good range of strategies to improve basic skills. Proof reading and re-drafting is encouraged by the use of writers' notebooks and work on computer. Work is marked thoroughly, using National Curriculum levels to assess attainment. By the end of Key Stage 4, all students make further progress. Skills in personal and imaginative writing are consolidated and developed. Literature essays are often less effective, lapsing into narration at the expense of detailed textual comment or description of personal response. In the Sixth Form, students write intelligently, making appropriate use of textual detail to substantiate arguments. Throughout the school, handwriting and presentation skills are very good. There are many examples of word-processed and some desk-top published work which show that new technologies are used effectively, though no ICT lessons in English were seen.
90. The standard of teaching is good throughout the school. No unsatisfactory lessons were observed. Some very good lessons were seen at Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form. Teachers manage students very well and, in most classes, supportive and constructive relationships are forged. They also monitor students' progress carefully and are prepared to give additional help and guidance through extra tuition. The best lessons are brisk, purposeful and well planned. Overall aims are helpfully shared with students, and learning activities are reviewed in a final plenary session. Strengths are seen in teachers' good subject knowledge, particularly in the Sixth Form, and use of a range of methods to generate interest. One year 9 lesson on 'Macbeth' was particularly well-paced and varied with a mixture of whole class and paired discussions, individual reflection and writing. Students were clearly engaged in the text studied, and helped by the variety of approach. Some imaginative teaching to develop writing skills was also seen. In a Year 7 lesson based on the class reader 'The Midnight Fox' by Betsy Byars, the teacher helped students to appreciate the dramatic impact of using the present tense in descriptive writing by first modeling the approach sensitively on his own past experience. At Key Stage 4, it was sometimes difficult to match the pace to suit all in mixed ability teaching groups. Likewise, the methodology of small group work did not always advance understanding as effectively as teacher-led discussion, particularly in considering more complex literary texts. Appropriate homework is set and marked regularly.
91. Overall, good teaching promotes good learning. Students are conscientious and try hard to improve their work. They are encouraged to be responsible for their own learning. Teachers could further this process by ensuring that all understand the process of assessment more

clearly, and by using assessment criteria more explicitly to inform lessons. Setting of subject-specific targets for improved attainment would also help students to understand their own learning better.

92. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department sets a clear educational direction for the subject. There is a long-standing programme of lesson observations and termly monitoring of work set. Staff work together well to share and develop good practice. New members of staff are well supported. There are strong links with colleagues in feeder primary schools. The department is committed to staff development and teachers keep up to date with developments in the subject. External visits and theatre trips enrich provision. All of these factors have led to incremental improvements in teaching.
93. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards of attainment have been maintained overall at Key Stage 3, with more pupils reaching level 5 and above. Higher grade GCSE results have improved from well below national averages at the time of the last inspection to almost match national averages in 2000. A level results have improved from below to above national averages, with 100 per cent success rates over the past three years. Students now show greater skills in discussing a range of issues and abstract ideas. There has been good development of writing for a range of different purposes and audiences, with improvements in basic skills and standards of presentation. Finally, there have been improvements in standards of teaching, in particular with a greater variety of approaches. The department is well placed to make further improvements in standards of teaching and learning. Key issues for further development of students' literacy skills are well identified in the department's improvement plan. The use of assessment to inform teaching more fully and improve students' understanding and evaluation of their own learning is a second main area for development.

Drama

94. Drama comes under the title of 'Performing Arts', alongside dance and music. It is taught as a separate subject at Key Stage 3, and is offered as an optional GCSE subject at Key Stage 4. In the Sixth Form, it is one component of the Performance Studies Advanced level examination. At each key stage, courses are designed to develop understanding of performance skills and dramatic conventions. They also explore links with other subjects, including art, history and personal and social education. The department co-operates with the English department to organise theatre visits and to support work on Shakespeare, in preparation for the Key Stage 3 tests.
95. At Key Stage 3, standards of attainment are in line with national expectations. Students work well together in small groups to plan and prepare performances. They develop sound communication skills and some ability to evaluate their learning and achievement. At Key Stage 4, about 20-25 pupils choose to take drama each year. Standards inevitably vary from year to year in these smaller teaching groups, according to the prior attainment of those opting to take the subject. In 2000, the proportion of pupils gaining higher grade passes at GCSE was well below the national average, though all pupils obtained passes at grades A*-G. In the previous two years, results were well above national averages, particularly in 1999 when all students gained higher grade passes. At A level, all students have obtained passes at grades A-E in the drama component of Performance Studies over the past three years. In 2000, all obtained passes at the higher grades of A-C.
96. Pupils clearly enjoy drama lessons and take the subject seriously. At Key Stage 3, students speak and listen confidently and well in a range of contexts. One Year 7 group worked hard to perform condensed versions of stories based on African myths. The lesson was structured in small steps to emphasise the importance of basic skills in voice projection and synchronising speech and movement. Students co-operated well together to achieve their objectives. At Key Stage 4 and at A level, pupils are well-motivated and go about their work with commitment. They make good progress in developing a more structured insight to the subject and are able to reflect on and justify the use of specific dramatic techniques. Practical work for group

performances based on social issues in a Year 11 class showed flair and attack. Students demonstrated sound understanding of presentational techniques and achieved good standards in expressive speech. At all ages, students understand the need to think through and develop ideas for drama work.

97. It was possible during the inspection to observe only a small sample of lessons. On the evidence provided, teaching is good throughout the school. Sound standards are promoted in particular by teachers' good subject knowledge and very good pupil management, which helps to form constructive relationships in classes. There is good planning for lessons, with a strong focus on evaluation of achievement. Pupils' peer and self-assessment is encouraged and improved through videos of practical work which can be reviewed and analysed.
98. The teacher in charge of the subject has worked hard to create up-to-date schemes of work, which are practical and helpful. The dedicated drama studio provides a good space for drama work, and there is sufficient specialist equipment for effective teaching of the subject. To enrich pupils' experience of the curriculum, after school and lunchtime drama clubs are offered for Key Stage 3 students. Finally, the department makes a particularly valuable contribution to school life through biennial school productions, in collaboration with other colleagues in performing arts, and art and music departments. This year some 40 students are involved as cast members and backstage support for a musical play entitled 'Glitter, Flares and Strange Affairs'. This is an original work, entirely written and produced by members of the performing arts staff. It was clear from the final rehearsal seen during the inspection that both staff and students give considerable time and energy to achieve high standards for public performance. Technical assistance for the production was provided by professional staff from Chatham Central Theatre – a link that helps students to understand the expectations and demands of the commercial theatre.

Media Studies

99. Students are taught some media within English lessons, but there is also a discrete GCSE course at Key Stage 4 and an A level course in the Sixth Form. These courses had just started at the time of the last inspection. GCSE results are consistently good with over three-quarters of those entered achieving A*-C grades in 2000. The majority of students exceed their expected grade. For the last four years all students doing the A level course have passed and some have obtained A and B grades.
100. Work seen during the inspection was consistent with these good results. Students have good knowledge and understanding of media, and demonstrate good creative and practical skills. They know about the use of language for effect, the importance of audience, and about representation, stereotyping, bias and the communication of underlying values in the media. Their written work is good and they develop very good skills in the use of ICT, including desk-top publishing, video, digital cameras and editing suites. They have very good attitudes to the subject and make good use of opportunities for developing their own ideas and completing exciting and imaginative assignments.
101. Teaching is good because the teacher's expertise and enthusiasm engages the students and motivates their desire to learn and progress. Teaching is well planned and the stimulating assignments are tackled through varied approaches in which students have to think for themselves. Because of the good guidance and support they feel confident to try out their ideas in a variety of media. Resources are well used to develop critical thinking and evaluation skills and to spark ideas. The best teaching is characterised by clear expectations and good pace. Very good questioning challenges students to think more deeply as in a good A level lesson where students were analysing the film techniques used to present male and female characters. The teacher recognises the need to balance strong leadership of the class with ensuring that the students develop their critical faculties by evaluating both their own ideas and those of others. Homework assignments include good preparation for future lessons.

102. The teacher in charge of media manages the subject very well and makes good links into other areas of the curriculum. She is well supported within the faculty structure and by senior management and good use is made of the resources upon which the subject depends.

MATHEMATICS

103. At the end of Key Stage 3 in the national tests in 2000 the proportion of students achieving level five or above was below the national average. It was well below the national average for the proportion achieving level six or better and also compared on the basis of average point score. But when compared with the results obtained by students from similar schools, results were broadly in line. From 1997 to 2000 the results have been below the national average. They fell in last summer's examinations making the trend in attainment lower than national trend. Results in the 2000 GCSE exams were below national standards for A* to C grades and above for grades A* to G. Compared with similar schools results were broadly in line with the average for grades A* to C. Results are broadly in line with those in other subjects. The last six years has seen a rise of those attaining grades A* to C from below 19 per cent to the current figure of almost 34 per cent. There has been a significant improvement in the achievement of higher attaining students. In the Sixth Form there are no students studying for A or A/S level mathematics, but all Sixth Form students study application of number as part of the Key Skills programme. Standards are in line with national expectations.
104. In recent years standards of attainment in mathematics on entry to the school have improved so that they are now broadly in line with the national average. However, the effect of entry policy into local selective schools still means that there are proportionately fewer of the highest attaining pupils. But by the end of both key stages achievement is satisfactory as a result of effective teaching. Students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, as do those for whom English is an additional language. In the number element of the Key Skills programme, achievement is satisfactory.
105. Work seen during the inspection is below national standards at Key Stage 4, but it is now broadly in line with national standards at Key Stage 3. This is because the introduction of the national numeracy strategy in primary schools has had a positive effect on the mathematical knowledge and skills of the students joining the school in Year 7. It was not possible to see any taught lessons in the Sixth Form because the students were involved in external examinations during the week of the inspection.
106. At the end of Key Stage 3, students are secure in their use of the four rules of number in written work and have reasonable, and in most cases good, knowledge of multiplication tables up to six times. Some, even amongst the lower attaining, can manage long division of four and five digit numbers by two digit numbers up to a hundred. Higher attaining can use a calculator very effectively to work out the VAT to be paid on an item and can solve linear equations such as $3x - 2(12 - x) = 4(2x - 3) + 3(x + 1)$.
107. Students at the end of Key Stage 4 are less confident when recalling multiplication facts than younger students. Higher attaining students use calculators well to find standard deviations of sets of numerical data, and show a good understanding of ratio and proportion. Middle attaining students can solve linear simultaneous equations with different coefficients. Lower attaining students can recognise lines of reflection for plane figures and planes of symmetry for a cube or square based pyramid.
108. In the majority of lessons the attitudes and behaviour of the students are very good as a result of the good teaching. Students are engaged in their own learning. For example teachers provide opportunities for students to mark their own work, which is then checked by the teachers. This encourages students to learn from their mistakes and teachers add helpful advice and comment.

109. Teaching and learning at both key stages are good. The teachers have good knowledge and understanding, and use the information they gain from marking the students' work well to inform what they do in lessons. Organisation is good and they manage the students well so that little time is wasted and students work hard. Because teachers give good guidance, most students know how to improve their work and the department is developing this strength. At Key Stage 4 teachers give good encouragement to students to think about their own areas for development and set targets for themselves. They make good use of an effective system of rewards, including the use of stamps and "smiley faces" for good work in their books. By awarding certificates of merit to those who do well they provide good motivation and encourage progress. Relationships in the classroom are very good, both between the teachers and the students and amongst the students themselves. The quality of both relationships and behaviour does much to contribute to the students' progress.
110. The use of homework overall by the teachers is satisfactory but good use of homework sheets was seen in number of lessons. These consisted of examples covering work done over a period of time so that the students continually revise and review their work keeping it fresh in their minds. A very good lesson began with a warm up activity in which the pupils answered questions from "continuous dominoes". This demanded quick fire answers to a range of mental arithmetic and number problems. The main body of the lesson concerned ratio. It was characterised by excellent clear explanation throughout and excellent use of praise. The teacher used an excellent audio visual aid in the form of a mounted and framed diagram constructed from sweets to show the equivalence between 1:2, 2:4, 3:6 etcetera. Organisation was very good and the level of pace and challenge pitched just right, as could be seen by the way she stopped the video to interject and talk the pupils through what had been said, and how, for instance, tables of ingredients for recipes can be adjusted. The teacher keeps a detailed mark book fully up to date and containing detailed information of the students' work levels and where they have difficulties. This enabled her to target questions very effectively to pupils for whom the answers were challenging but within their capability.
111. The quality and range of learning opportunities is good. In addition to the lessons provided within normal timetabled time the teachers give generously of their time to provide extra opportunities for learning outside normal school hours. The extra provision for high achievers in their GCSE year, including Saturday morning sessions, is particularly effective. Interest and motivation is also enhanced by interesting quizzes and other opportunities, such as entering students for the Mathematical Association's national challenge.
112. Good curriculum links are maintained with nearby primary schools. Year 6 students begin a topic on data handling, which they complete when they arrive at the school. This helps to ensure that learning is continuous and enables teachers from each phase of education to work together. Teachers spent valuable time in primary schools observing the numeracy hour in action. These links are further enhanced through the provision of an effective summer school for primary school students who are about to transfer to secondary education.
113. Teachers use ICT to enhance learning at both key stages. An integrated learning skills program is well used to teach a range of numerical skills and understanding. But the lack of computers in classrooms, and particularly the lack of Internet access, reduces opportunities. Good use is made of computer based revision work for students approaching GCSE.
114. The teaching of numeracy has improved not only in mathematics but in other subjects. A good start has been made with plans for a whole school approach. The teaching of literacy is good. Teachers encourage students to use language carefully, when speaking to the class or answering questions, and teachers generally insist on rigorous use of vocabulary in oral and sometimes in written work. Literacy is encouraged by the good display of key words on the walls and on eye-catching wire mobiles.
115. Leadership is good. The head of department is a very good teacher who has determination and enthusiasm. A well-qualified team of mathematics teachers works together closely, focussing on improving students' performance. The teachers' work is supported by formal classroom

observation on at least one occasion per year. She keeps a very close eye on professional standards, monitoring of marking and record keeping. Arrangements for mutual support are very effective. Peer monitoring provides a useful platform for sharing good practice.

116. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. GCSE results have risen. Teaching shows good improvement. Target-setting is now in place both for students and for staff. Creative curriculum arrangements have been introduced for those students who do not enjoy school as much as they might. Accommodation has improved. To improve further the department should incorporate more ICT into its teaching and learning and ensure that all lessons contain the level of challenge seen in the best.

SCIENCE

117. Attainment on entry to Year 7 is below the national average. This applies to both essential scientific knowledge and to understanding of basic concepts; the level of experimental skill varies. At both key stages attainment overall remains below the national average. In the Sixth Form it is variable, reflecting individual students' prior attainment. At the end of Key Stage 3 in 2000, the proportion of students gaining level 5 and level 6 was well below the national average. The average point score was well below the average for all maintained schools. However, in comparison with similar schools the performance has been close to average. Over the previous three years standards at the end of Key Stage 3 had been steadily improving, but fell in 2000, reflecting lower prior attainment and staffing problems.
118. At the end of Key Stage 4, in 2000, the proportion of students gaining GCSE A*-C grades for double award combined science was below the national average, as was the average point score. The proportion was also below the average for similar schools. In the previous two years the results were significantly higher, and closer to the national average. Standards in science have not been as high as in English or mathematics. In the Sixth Form the 2000 results in advanced and intermediate GNVQ science have been below average but appropriate to the prior attainment of the very few students involved. Standards in the current Year 13 Advanced GNVQ reflect an impressive achievement from fairly low GCSE attainment, through intermediate and merit standard to advanced work. The school introduced GCE A level biology in 1999 and AS level chemistry in 2000. Standards are variable but again reflect good achievement.
119. Overall, achievement over both key stages is satisfactory, and in the Sixth Form it is good. From below average attainment on entry to the school students now at the end of Key Stage 3 are achieving standards closer to the national average. The current Year 11 students were below average at the end of Key Stage 3 and are still below average. However, at both key stages, the few above average students do not make sufficient progress because the teaching does not challenge them enough. The achievement of students with special educational needs and of those for whom English is an additional language is satisfactory, but they make good progress in investigation and group work.
120. In work seen during the inspection standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are closer to the national average, except for the absence of the highest attaining students, because of the selection process at 11. At the end of Key Stage 4 they are still below average. In Key Stage 3, for example, most students in an upper set, when engaged in scientific enquiry, follow instructions well, make good observations of chemical displacement reactions and keep accurate records. They analyse results sufficiently to draw simple conclusions. But for a significant minority, gains in understanding are not secure and very few evaluate the method or think more widely about applications. Students with special educational needs reach standards in line with other students, especially in investigation work, but are hindered when teachers do not provide them with appropriate material. At the end of Key Stage 4, most students in the top set of Year 11 studying materials and their properties have a sound knowledge of the role of catalysts in chemistry and biology. But only a minority has the depth of understanding to know what they need to do to achieve the highest grades. In lower sets, students know basic facts but many do not apply their knowledge with any confidence.

121. Standards of literacy in science are good at Key Stage 3. Students describe experimental investigation with good expression and draw diagrams with care. Written work is presented neatly. Punctuation is generally accurate and appropriate technical vocabulary is increasingly used. Standards at Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form are satisfactory. Standards of numeracy are satisfactory in both key stages and in the Sixth Form, with students handling numbers with appropriate confidence and producing graphs of reasonable accuracy. ICT skills are under-used in science, largely due to limited availability of suitable computers in the department.
122. Teaching is at least satisfactory throughout and at Key Stage 3 and in the Sixth Form it is good. Analysis of students' work and observation indicate many good features. All teachers have very good knowledge of their own particular specialism and a satisfactory general knowledge of science, although there is no specialist physics teacher. Planning for interesting activities, including extensive practical work, is satisfactory, and based on developing schemes of work. For example, students use chemical catalysts in simple experiments, relate the observations to real applications seen on video recording and then engage in small group discussion about the role of biological catalysts. Higher attaining students, however, are not sufficiently challenged and do not reach the highest levels in tests and examinations. For example, although all pupils learn about the structure of the human breathing system, there was little opportunity given to higher attaining students to deepen their understanding. Students are not given enough opportunity to organise their own learning.
123. Because of the very good way the teachers manage their students, behaviour and personal relationships are very good. In consequence learning is purposeful and productive. The great majority of students are very willing to learn. They carry out tasks with great reliability and take pride in their work. They are interested if not enthused by the subject. Students respond to teachers' questions but are reluctant to challenge information or to extend their learning beyond what they are told to do. Many lack the confidence to participate in discussion because insufficient time is allocated for effective questions and answer sessions. For example, students investigating the operation of electric circuits, work in small teams to set up circuits, take simple measurements and draw conclusions based on the data obtained. Learning is better at Key Stage 3 because the course structure has been improved and standards of basic literacy are better than at Key Stage 4. In the Sixth Form the high level of individual teaching to the very small numbers of students results in good achievement. Students collaborate very well, for example in practical work, sharing ideas and supporting each other. Students with special educational needs make good progress when learning support is provided.
124. In the long double lessons, the pace of learning is inclined to be leisurely and interest hard to maintain. Opportunities for assessment in class are generally not exploited well enough through question and answer techniques. Whilst these assessment opportunities are being used effectively in some classes, in many cases they are not developed sufficiently to involve fully and engage all students. For example, in a Year 9 lesson, the teacher's questions were too brief, requiring little explanation by the students when they answered. Marking of students' work does not inform students what is required to achieve improvement. Regular assessments are carried out and increasingly a good range of data is analysed to identify any underachievement. Homework is set regularly and builds on the content of the lesson.
125. The leadership of the department is satisfactory. There are clear aims and goals reflecting those of the school. Teachers are committed to raising standards. Laboratory technicians provide good support to learning. New staff appointments have overcome the problems that contributed to the fall in standards in 2000. There is still an imbalance of expertise, with most teachers having first qualification in biology and some lack of confidence in physics. The head of the department has monitored teachers' work, for example by analysis of group examination and test scores. But there is not enough monitoring of teaching through classroom observation to evaluate teachers' skills and identify with appropriate rigour areas for improvement. Accommodation is unsatisfactory, since three laboratories are in mobile buildings and transport of equipment can be hazardous and at best inconvenient.

126. Overall, there has been good improvement since the last inspection. Although attainment at Key Stage 3 has remained steadily below the national average, it improved in 1999. While it fell again in the most recent tests, current standards are much closer to the national average. GCSE results have been improving, although the overall performance fell in the last year. Teaching has improved. Marking is undertaken regularly, but still needs improving. The procedures for assessment are improving. To improve further the department should ensure that higher attaining students are more fully challenged, and the use of ICT within the curriculum should be developed.

ART AND DESIGN

127. The Key Stage 3 teacher assessments show that standards are in line with national expectations. At the end of Key Stage 4 standards are just below the national average overall. They are, however, much better in the drawing and painting option where they have been rising steadily over the last three years. In the Sixth Form all students passed the A level examination, though numbers are too small to compare with national figures or to identify any trends.
128. In work seen during the inspection standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are average; they are above average at the end of Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form. Achievement in Key Stage 3 is also satisfactory and good in Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form. All the students observed in Year 7 can use coloured pencils to achieve a variety of tones, textures and patterns, some of them attractive and skilful. However, the use of prepared worksheets results in a lack of variety of end product. Higher attaining students in Year 8 demonstrate how they incorporate the architectural ideas of the artist Hundertwasser into designs for a clay tile based on the façade of a building. Others try out underglaze colours prior to glazing their tiles. Students in Year 9 show how studies of shoes can be made into a townscape and some students understand how this is like the work of Surrealist artists. Insufficient use is made of sketchbooks for personal enquiry and research throughout the key stage. This has an adverse effect on the ability of students to develop their own personal responses.
129. In Key Stage 4 Year 10 students show how the work of Matisse and Klimt can inspire silk-screen prints onto fabric. Higher attaining students in Year 11 produce sensitive work in a variety of media, interpreting themes requiring much thought. Examples are "Hidden Meanings" – the depiction of an unborn child surrounded by the dangers and evils in the world as perceived by the prospective parents. "Portrait" is the depiction of seeing beneath the surface to view hidden fears of mortality. Lower attaining pupils and those with special educational needs achieve satisfactory standards. Progress in the drawing and painting option is very good and better than in the textiles and ceramics options. However standards in both 3D studies and textiles show a recent upward trend that may continue if staff changes taking place at the time of the inspection have a positive effect.
130. A level students take good responsibility for their own learning and work on individual self-motivated projects. Year 12 students produce work in a wide variety of media and can research themes well. By Year 13 students demonstrate considerable skill in the use of oils, acrylics and other 2D media.
131. During the inspection temporary staffing arrangements were in place, pending the appointment of a new head of department and other permanent staff. Teaching and learning were satisfactory at Key Stage 3 and good at Key Stages 4 and in the Sixth Form. As a result attitudes and behaviour were good. Students listen intently to instructions and answer questions thoughtfully. They are polite to one another and to adults. The main strength of the department is the good subject knowledge of all the teachers. Teaching and learning are however adversely affected at Key Stage 3 by the limitations of the schemes of work. Many tasks concentrate on practical elements rather than knowledge and understanding. There are insufficient opportunities for

students to share ideas and thoughts and to evaluate their own and others' work. The result is work that looks very similar because teaching does not encourage a variety of responses.

132. At Key Stages 4 and in the Sixth Form the good teaching and learning is particularly noticeable in the drawing and painting option and in the full textiles course. Students are encouraged to develop a personal response to themes, resulting in a rich variety of work. In a Year 11 lesson the teacher moved around the class giving instruction and encouragement, inspiring and challenging pupils to achieve more, to try something new, to do extra. The pupils responded with enthusiasm and produced very individual work of a high standard. This way of working is further developed in the Sixth Form where the course is entirely student-led.
133. Where teaching is strong, planning is thorough and examination objectives as well as lesson objectives are made clear to students. This means they are able to focus on the task and judge clearly for themselves how well they are doing. Where teaching is weak there are low expectations of students' achievement, for example, teachers using prepared worksheets that do not allow students to develop their own ideas or show initiative. As a result progress is unsatisfactory. During the inspection homework was set only in Years 7 and 8 and was unsatisfactory because it involved only worksheets. In Key Stage 4 individual coursework is supported.
134. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. The use of assessment data and target setting has had an effect on the GCSE results which were well-below average and are now only just below average. The work of GCSE students shows a clear grasp of examination criteria and as a result examination results are better. Regular monitoring of teaching with feedback by senior management and colleagues has had some effect on the standard of teaching, especially at Key Stages 4 and in the Sixth Form. There is improvement in enquiry skills and the use of art history and the understanding of the importance of artists' work at Key Stage 4.
135. To improve further the department should examine and share good practice. They should re-visit the schemes of work and find ways of ensuring a greater degree of personal development, creativity and expression, especially at Key Stage 3. They should improve the use of sketchbooks at Key Stage 3 and as a visual diary and personal record of research and experimental work at Key Stage 4. Greater use of ICT is needed to support learning.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

136. The 2000 teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 showed standards to be well above the national average. The overall assessment however, does not match the level of work seen in lessons. The proportion of students achieving GCSE grades A* to C was well above the national average and the results of similar schools. Results show considerable improvement since 1998. Students achieve better results in graphic products than they do in resistant materials or child development. Those students who enter design and technology examinations achieve better results than in the other subjects that they study. The school does however enter fewer students for design and technology examinations than other schools nationally.
137. In work seen during the inspection, standards are above average at the end of both key stages and in the Sixth Form. Achievement in Key Stage 3 is very good, given students' attainment levels when they enter the school. In Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form achievement is good. In Key Stage 3 students develop a good breadth of basic skills in a range of areas such as food, graphic products, textiles, resistant materials, electronics and control technology. In food, however, there is less evidence of students designing their own products, particularly in Year 9, than in the other material areas. This is because National Curriculum assessment is not linked closely enough to students' work. Students analyse existing products and use the information effectively to design their own products. As part of their research, students use numerical data in the form of charts, graphs and food calculations. They use a suitable range of graphics skills to support their design proposals, including two and three-dimensional drawings. Most students annotate their drawings to explain features and methods of constructing each stage of their

designs. Students with special educational needs make very good progress because they are well supported by teachers. Students use ICT well. They cover good foundation skills in the use of electronic circuits and they build well on their basic knowledge of electronic circuits, with an ability to correctly solder resistors and capacitors in the construction of their circuits. The areas of study they cover also include computer-aided control. Specialist kits are constructed to control the objects the students have made. In the work seen, students are taught to write the sequence for this control work before entering the information into the computer. This was seen in a Year 9 lesson where students were constructing objects, fitting a small motor and then preparing to link these to a computer to control the movement. Students worked confidently and showed a good knowledge of using construction kits, of input and output procedures, as well as the application of gears to change speed and direction.

138. In Key Stage 4 students use a good range of investigation and research skills to build their knowledge base about the products they design. Students of all attainment levels propose a good range of initial ideas from which they select the most appropriate for further development. They use the design process well, evaluating their designs by recording their strengths and weaknesses before they make final decisions. They develop work of very good quality, including a range of making skills, which includes the consideration of large-scale production and manufacturing techniques. For example, in Year 11, graphics students design activity travel packs suitable for young children. The students demonstrate an imaginative variety of ideas based on games and reading activities. Their design work shows a good analysis of existing products, and a high standard of graphics skills both for presenting their work and in the quality of drawings they produced to support their design ideas. Students doing resistant materials and graphics cover a good range of design skills as well as craft skills. Higher attaining students produce good quality products. Designs are supported with accurate, well-developed plans. All the work reflects a high degree of research. Higher attaining students apply accuracy and depth to the development of their designs. Lower attaining students design products well suited to the courses and were well supported by their teachers to complete each stage of the development process.
139. In the Sixth Form GNVQ Health and Social Care course, students participate well in activities and discussions and the standard of coursework is good. Activities are well structured and researched. For example, a lesson on statutory and non-statutory services in the community included a range of sources from which information was gained. Students used the Internet, local news articles as well as textbooks to read widely around the subject.
140. The quality of teaching and learning is good in both key stages and in the Sixth Form. Teachers use interesting projects to stimulate the interest of students. For example in a Year 9 textiles lesson, students were working with a variety of modelling materials as well as a variety of textiles to design and make a model of a new shoe. There was good use of the basic modelling processes to create interesting features in the designs. The students worked enthusiastically and took pride in their work. They explained well the processes they used to achieve the end results. Teaching included the analysis of existing products. In a Year 8 food lesson students were testing a variety of commercially prepared burgers. Teaching included good guidance on both testing and evaluative methods as well as observing healthy eating patterns. Students worked well both independently and sharing their findings on the fat content of the burgers and the effects of heat when cooked. This gave them a good opportunity to evaluate products, to consider market research and also to identify the need for good quality control. Teachers usually plan their lessons well and have high expectation of their students. They give good individual support to students of all levels of attainment with a structure to guide them through the process of design. This has a very positive impact on relationships between staff and students and creates a very good learning atmosphere. Some teachers succeed in extending students of all levels of attainment, but this is not consistent across the department. Some higher attaining and middle attaining students sometimes fail to analyse in sufficient depth; explanations are inclined to be short answers rather than extended thought. All teachers place a good emphasis on developing technical vocabulary when students record their findings; this is having a positive effect on the development of the students' literacy skills.

141. Leadership and management are satisfactory and the subject benefits from a strong team that works together. There is an appropriate system in place to monitor and record the attainment of students, which is now beginning to have a positive effect on raising standards. However, the information gathered from this process is still under-used to set subject specific targets to help students improve further. There is no strategic overview to plan and evaluate the examination courses offered for students at GCSE level. In consequence, GCSE courses do not at present fully meet the requirements for design and technology. The school has recognised this and has increased the technology options in Year 10 to include food technology; it proposes to introduce textiles technology at GCSE level next year.
142. Good progress has been made since the previous inspection. The quality of teaching and learning is now good overall. Achievement is also good. The accommodation has been improved by the addition of another resistant materials room and this now needs to be fully equipped.

GEOGRAPHY

143. Teacher assessments in 2000 showed standards at the end of Key Stage 3 to be below average. In the 2000 GCSE examinations, the proportion of A* to C passes was below the national average. This was a significant decline compared to results over the previous two years. Some of the decline can be explained by the fact that the cohort of students was of lower attainment than previous years. The school has undertaken a systematic analysis of results with the examining board, has examined its curriculum and teaching methods and is unable to find a further explanation. The level of A* to G passes was broadly in line with the national average. Results in geography were below those of most other subjects. However, inspection evidence suggests rising rather than falling standards at age 16. In addition to GCSE geography, students can opt for a GCSE course in travel and tourism. This was highly successful in 2000. All students passed and nearly three-quarters gained passes at A* to C. There were too few students entered for A level GCE to make statistical comparisons valid against national averages. The trend in attainment is good.
144. In general, students' attainment is below average when they come to the school. But by the end of Key Stage 3, in work seen during the inspection, standards are closer to average, and by the end of Key Stage 4 they are average so that achievement is good. Standards in the Sixth Form are in line with course expectations and students achieve well. Students with special educational needs make good progress and attain good standards in relation to their prior attainment. Students for whom English is an additional language receive a high level of very effective support and make very good progress.
145. By the end of Key Stage 3, students have acquired a sound geographical vocabulary. Students in Year 8, for example, use and understand such terms as hydrological cycle, relief rain, rain shadow, precipitation and condensation in their studies on weather and climate. Higher attaining students can understand geographical patterns that occur throughout the world and can explain the links between the environment and its effects on human activity. Higher attaining students in Year 9 produce good pieces of extended writing on how people adapt to cope with the volcanoes and earthquakes in Japan. Students are developing the important geographical skills of looking for evidence and interpretation.
146. By the end of Key Stage 4, students have developed their skills in readiness for the GCSE. They improve their independent learning skills. In work in travel and tourism on the impact of nuclear power stations, they research and write about the requirements for siting nuclear power stations, the subsequent changes to the environment and the effects on local people and visitors. They make good use of ICT to find information from the Internet, to refine their work and to create graphs and tables. Particularly good work was done by Year 11 students when writing up the results of a survey into why people shop in particular supermarkets.
147. Students in the Sixth Form have good independent learning skills and absorb and understand a large amount of factual material. They produce well-researched and written reports on their

fieldwork on the North West Kent Countryside Project. They have good diagram and map drawing skills. All make good use of ICT to support their learning.

148. The quality of teaching and the learning it promotes are good. One half of the teaching is satisfactory and one half is good or better. There is very good teaching in just under one-fifth of the lessons. A significant feature of all of the teaching is very good class control achieved without fuss and with good humour. Students and teachers show a high level of respect for each other and this leads to a relaxed and purposeful working atmosphere in lessons. Teachers carefully plan a range of challenging work that takes account of the range of attainment found in most classes. This is particularly so for students with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language. Where teaching is at its best, teachers use a wide range of authentic materials to ensure that varied and up to date information is taught. These may include information from websites, video presentations, satellite and aerial photographs as well as maps, diagrams and reading activities. Teachers are particularly skilled in question and answer sessions at drawing out students' ideas and making them think about concepts and geographical questions. They set relevant homework regularly. Students respond to the very good working atmosphere and the interesting lessons with very good attitudes to work and very good behaviour. They are conscientious, make good contributions to discussions and concentrate well. In some lessons which are satisfactory rather than good, teachers make minor factual errors which are later corrected, but which may nevertheless confuse students. Occasionally the teacher is so anxious to maintain a brisk pace that there is not sufficient checking to ensure that students have understood what is being taught. Time is wasted when the teacher repeats essential maps and diagrams on the blackboard, which could be presented with an overhead projector.
149. Teaching of basic skills is good. Literacy is developed through key words and the use of a range of geographical terms. Work is regularly marked and punctuation and spelling errors are corrected. Teaching of numeracy is good in many lessons where students routinely use graphs and tables to present evidence. They frequently use scales to interpret maps and measure distances. ICT is well used to edit and produce work as well as to research information. However, it is limited because geography is taught in temporary buildings where computers cannot be kept for security reasons.
150. There are a number of field courses and trips each year that help to enrich the curriculum and raise attainment. The subject makes a very good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Students have opportunities to reflect on their environment and to appreciate the wonders of nature and of the world. Fieldwork provides good opportunities for social development. Students learn about the cultures of other countries such as Japan.
151. The Head of Department has shown very good leadership and management. Good departmental documentation provides clear guidance to teachers. There are very good assessment procedures and good use is made of the data to track students' attainment and progress and set targets. Students know what National Curriculum level they are at and what to do to improve. Good monitoring and support of teaching ensures that best practice is shared. Although accommodation is satisfactory overall, it does not provide a good working environment where equipment can be stored securely.
152. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection. The good standards mentioned in the previous report have improved and the head of department sets appropriate, ambitious but attainable targets for future improvement.

HISTORY

153. Teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 have shown standards below the nationally expected level for the last two years. Numbers taking the GCSE course have been small, although the current Key Stage 4 groups are larger than in previous years. Results at grades A* to C, in two out of the last three years, have been above the national average for all schools; they are well above for all three years when compared with similar schools. Results at grades A

to G have been consistently above national averages for all schools and similar schools. In 2000 the students did better in history than they did in most other subjects, and for the last three years most students have performed at a higher level than their predicted grades. There has not been any Sixth Form course for four years.

154. At the end of Key Stage 3 attainment in work seen during the inspection is broadly in line with the expected level for 14 year olds. This represents an improvement on the standards of the previous two years. Effective teaching and the positive attitudes of students enable them to achieve well and make good progress over the key stage. Students often show a sound grasp of a topic, for example students in Year 8 working on the events leading up to the English Civil War in the 17th century. However, students sometimes have difficulty in recalling previous work and making links between different topics. On the whole students work well with historical sources; for example, lower attaining students in Year 9 successfully extracted from the Internet relevant information on the effects of cholera and typhoid in 19th century Britain. The extended writing of some higher attaining students is good, although many students find it difficult to select and organise information to produce structured written work.
155. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 in work seen is in line with national averages. This is below the standard of last year's GCSE results because of the wider range of attainment levels within the current Year 11 group. Achievement is good. Most students are mastering the content of the course effectively; for example, they have a sound understanding of topics and issues, such as the causes of poverty in Elizabethan England, and they have developed a secure chronological framework in their work on the development of medicine through time. Most students use sources of information well to investigate issues and draw relevant conclusions. Higher attaining students produce thorough, well argued written work but many students find analytical historical writing difficult.
156. The overall quality of teaching and learning at both key stages is good. It is never unsatisfactory and sometimes very good. Good strategies are used to improve literacy levels, such as highlighting key words and giving students help over structuring their writing. Lesson planning is thorough and work is usually well matched to the needs of all pupils. Weaknesses occur when learning objectives are not clearly stated or sufficiently focused, as this slows down the pace of students' learning. Teachers use a good range of teaching methods, which are effective in tackling new topics and in consolidating knowledge and understanding. Teachers' explanations and questioning are particular strengths; for example, in a Year 8 lesson a teacher's questions and clarifications extended students' understanding of the causes of the Civil War very effectively. Staff also use group work and video material well, which engage students' interest and extend their understanding. Students are well managed in lessons and this ensures good behaviour and full participation. Written work is well marked, often with helpful comments, although students at Key Stage 3 are sometimes uncertain about their standard and what they have to do to improve. Homework is set regularly and is planned well to extend classwork.
157. The level of improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The quality of teaching has improved significantly and students now play a much more active role in lessons. Standards have risen at both key stages and the achievement of higher attaining students, criticised in the last report, is now as good as other students. Good leadership and management of the department have been largely responsible for these improvements. Teaching and learning are carefully monitored, and the department's priorities for development are well judged. Procedures for assessment are good but the information obtained is not yet fully used to raise standards of attainment. The subject scheme of work has recently been revised, but at some points lacks sufficient detail to support the planning of lessons. Although ICT is used in a few history lessons, its use is still at an early stage of development. The department is well placed to address these issues.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

158. Teacher assessments indicate that in 2000 at the end of Key Stage 3 standards are in line with the national average. Results of the GCSE full and short courses taken by all pupils in 2000 show that the proportion of pupils attaining grades A* to C was below the national average. The school only entered a small number of students who had a particular interest in doing ICT at GCSE level.
159. In work seen during the inspection standards at both key stages and in the Sixth Form are in line with the national average. At Key Stage 3 this represents good achievement, given their levels of attainment on joining the school. They cover a good range of skills and use a variety of software. Examples are desktop publishing packages, spreadsheets and databases. Control technology is covered within design and technology lessons. Students use the Internet and CD-ROMs to research information. Students of all levels of attainment achieve basic competence in the skills covered in ICT lessons, with higher attaining pupils being showing greater depth of understanding. For example, all students are able to set up a spreadsheet, enter data and use formula to calculate results. But higher attaining students can identify changes to the results of their calculations by entering varying data and noting the outcomes. They understand how the variables affect the end results. Students are familiar with the application of databases. In Year 9 students set up a database, entered information and knew how to retrieve it. They could interrogate information and note their findings. Higher attaining students were able to view and present the information in different formats. Students at all levels talked confidently about their findings.
160. Students in Key Stage 4 continue to achieve well. They apply a range of skills and demonstrate increasing depth of understanding. Those on GCSE courses evaluate their achievements to identify ways of improving their work. They are beginning to show greater independence in their use of their skills. They demonstrate greater depth of understanding and they use ICT in their coursework in other subjects, increase their competence. Higher attaining students in design and technology use computers well to support their design work. Students of all attainment levels use ICT well to process and present data they collect and apply. Lower attaining students use ICT to increase the quality and presentation of their coursework.
161. In the Sixth Form achievement is good. Students work hard to reach the levels required for the GNVQ Intermediate course. Some have not completed an ICT course at GCSE level but work really well to cover the work at the right level. The school has also started the Certificate of Vocational Education, which involves students well in the commercial publishing process. They link with printing companies and design and complete information booklets for the school.
162. The quality of teaching is good in Key Stages 3 and 4. It is very good in the Sixth Form. As a result learning is good. However, there is not enough use of ICT in other subjects to ensure that pupils consolidate their skills through regular practice. In ICT lessons teachers show a high level of planning and preparation. Lessons have clear objectives that support learning. Teachers explain technical language and encourage students to use it correctly. Students with lower than average reading skills in particular benefit from this. Teachers produce a useful range of worksheets to reinforce learning and to support students in using the software more independently. These are helpful in moving learning on when students undertake projects. Teachers have good knowledge of their subject. They use questions and answers effectively to assess how much the students learn and also to ensure they are challenged in their thinking. Lessons are well structured and provide students with a good variety of activities to sustain their interest; as a result they respond well. The pace of learning is good. For example, in a Year 9 lesson on databases the teacher provided a poster and a worksheet to explain the process of using a database. This helped them to work more independently. The teacher compared the use of a database to store information with a traditional filing cabinet. This effectively helped to clarify how the search operation worked.
163. The use of ICT in other subjects to support the curriculum is satisfactory but inconsistent. Good use was seen in design and technology where students design electronic circuit boards using a specialist program. They also use specialist kits to control traffic lights and spreadsheets to

process research information. They use the Internet and CD-ROMs effectively for research in a range of subjects. In English students make good use of word processing and desktop publishing. In mathematics students used spreadsheets and databases to underpin what they are taught. There is satisfactory use in business studies and in history, where students use the Internet particularly well to research historical information. The use of ICT is under-developed in religious education, art, science and modern foreign languages. Students are encouraged to attend extracurricular clubs during lunch times and after school. They make good use of an integrated learning program to improve their basic skills in mathematics and English.

164. ICT is well managed. There is a strong departmental team that includes a large number of teachers who also teach in other departments. Work is well co-ordinated and there is now a reliable and effective computer network in place. This has added to the range of software and skills covered. Teachers give their time willingly during lunch times and after school to support students with their work.
165. The school has addressed a number of issues since the last inspection and has made good improvements. Both teaching and learning is now good overall. The subject now meets statutory requirements both in National Curriculum assessment and in reporting to parents.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

166. Teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 show standards are in line with the national average. Over recent years the standards of students at 16 have been close to the national average. In the 2000 GCSE examinations in French the proportion of students gaining A*-C grades was below the national average, but above the average for similar schools. In German, where there was a smaller number entered, the proportion at higher grades was in line with girls' performance in all maintained schools and a marked improvement on 1999. In both languages progress since the end of Year 9 is better by comparison with similar students nationally. The results do not acknowledge that the school enters a higher percentage of students for GCSE than similar schools. Good teaching and the positive attitudes of students are major factors in the standards reached. Achievement by students of all levels of attainment is good. There is currently no Sixth Form work to report on.
167. In work seen during the inspection the overall standard is in line with national levels at both key stages in French and German. Where Spanish is taught to some groups of lower attaining students standards are well below national averages but in line with their previous attainment. Students are better at listening and writing than speaking. Listening skills are good because teachers do most of their teaching in the foreign language. Students listen to taped conversation on topics such as travel and pick out the key information about departure times, platforms and ticket costs. Students make good progress in writing. By the end of Year 9 they can write short passages about themselves, give descriptions of their bedrooms and make up short television interviews. Students with special educational needs know the important words for a topic and can use them in guided writing. By the end of Year 11 students are writing with more detail, can express opinions and argue the advantages and disadvantages of a situation. There is limited extended or creative writing by higher attaining students. Speaking skills are less well developed. Good displays encourage the use of the foreign language in classroom situations such as asking for paper or apologising for forgetting homework, but languages are not routinely used in such situations. Students' replies are often short and hesitant. There are very few examples of instinctive replies. When reading a text, pronunciation is often very literal.
168. Teaching and learning are good overall. They are good at Key Stage 3, never less than satisfactory and more frequently good at Key Stage 4. Teaching benefits from having three native speakers who give good insights into the country as well as the language. All teachers are competent in both languages that they teach. Sustained use of the foreign language presents a challenge to the students and results in good listening skills. A major strength of the teaching is the teachers' relationships with the students. As a result students do not feel inhibited and the majority participate actively in classwork; they enjoy learning and their

attitudes and behaviour are very good. They come to lessons well-prepared so that the whole lesson is for learning. They work constructively in pair work. Where there is laughter at mistakes it is shared and not targeted at any individual. Lessons are well planned with good use of visual materials, cards and objects to help understanding without resorting to English. The frequent use of mime avoids the need for English and the associated humour stimulates learning. For example, in a lesson where the French word for 'party' was not known the teacher danced enthusiastically, with the result that the students understood and were able to recall the word at the end of the lesson. The best planning builds on previous work and takes account of students who have special educational needs. Teachers' questions help students to make progress in their understanding of grammar from the basic matter of gender to more complex verb constructions. In some lessons students deduce grammar rules for themselves. Teachers take opportunities to teach learning strategies, such as looking for similar English words when faced with unknown words in the foreign language. They check at the end of lessons to confirm that students have understood. Learning is best where students are encouraged to work independently. It is unsatisfactory where they become dependent on the teacher when they are uncertain, rather than using dictionaries and their exercise books.

169. The use of ICT has not been developed to support teaching and learning. The teaching of languages contributes to students' literacy skills through the explanation of grammar, the use of writing frameworks and dictionary skills. Work with numbers, time and shopping reinforces numeracy skills. Teaching is less effective where the written word and translation are introduced before students have done enough speaking practice to memorise words with the correct pronunciation. This results in students becoming dependent on written prompts rather than memory and contributes to the weaknesses in speaking skills observed with students of all abilities. Good practice was seen in one lower attaining group in Year 9, where almost no English was used and the teacher insisted on accurate pronunciation. Teachers assess students accurately and keep good records. Up to Year 9 work is marked to show students their National Curriculum levels. The work of GCSE students is marked to the examination criteria. Work is often corrected at some length but there is no clear policy for correction so that elementary mistakes are often repeated. The use of the school's data about students has not been fully developed to monitor progress. Homework is not always set when timetabled. Most homework consists of further practice and many of the tasks are insufficiently demanding for higher attaining students.
170. The modern languages department is a well-led team. In addition to offering three languages they organise regular visits to France and Germany and make a large contribution to students' cultural development. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The department has resolved all the issues identified and have raised standards. The team has the capacity and ideas to continue to improve. They should review the amount of material in the schemes of work to find more time to develop speaking skills, make the schemes of work a working document for teachers' planning and develop the use of student attainment data to monitor progress.

MUSIC

171. The end of Key Stage 3 teacher assessment results for 2000 were in line with the national average. The proportion of students achieving A*-C grades in the 2000 GCSE examination was in line with the national average. The results were above the national average when compared to similar schools. No students in Year 11 are taking the GCSE course this year. However, there is a good take up rate for the subject in the current Year 10.
172. Attainment is broadly in line with national expectations at the end of Key Stage 3. Due to timetabling arrangements in the week of the inspection no lessons were seen in Year 10 of Key Stage 4. However, scrutiny of work and evidence from extracurricular activities confirms that Year 10 students are attaining in line with course-related expectations. The achievement of students in both key stages is satisfactory in relation to their age and ability. The previous report stated that attainment in Key Stages 3 and 4 was low. There has been a good

improvement in the attainment of students in both key stages since the previous inspection. Students with special educational needs, those with English as an additional language and the more musically able make satisfactory progress in lessons. Students who take part in extracurricular activities achieve standards of performance that are in line with those expected for their age. However, a small minority of students achieves standards that are above those normally expected.

173. Students in Key Stage 3 play keyboards and tuned percussion instruments. They use and understand simple notation and use improvisation for short compositions. They sing well in two parts. They develop their listening skills and gain an understanding of how music is created. For example, in a Year 9 lesson, students listened to a performance of Thinking Blues by Bessie Smith. They made comparisons with the popular music of today. They showed a satisfactory understanding of the chords used in the twelve bar blues. They then played these on keyboards, with a few students adding a short melodic part above. Students listen to their own performances and offer suggestions for improvement. In a Year 7 lesson, students played the Egyptian Sand Dance on keyboards and tuned percussion instruments. They made a recording of their performance and evaluated the outcomes. They identified ways that the performance might be improved. Students in Key Stage 4 devise and notate short compositions. They use musical vocabulary to answer questions about listening tasks. They show a developing knowledge of music from other cultures.
174. The quality of teaching and learning in Key Stage 3 is good. No judgement can be made about teaching in Key Stage 4 because of insufficient evidence. Teaching is good in Key Stage 3 because listening and performing tasks are well-integrated. This enables students to further develop their understanding of the different musical elements. Clear learning objectives for lessons and good class management have a positive impact on learning. As a result, students have good attitudes towards the subject. They are always well-behaved and work co-operatively when required. They gain confidence as performers. For example, in a Year 8 lesson students were made to understand clearly the need to practice to achieve success. Students played the melody of Fur Elise by Beethoven. They persevered in learning their own part until they were confident to play it to the class.
175. Good provision is made to develop students' literacy skills. The use of ICT to assist students in composing is in the early stages of development. There is very good provision for extracurricular activities and these involve over 130 students. Provision includes an orchestra, choir, the Elite Ensemble and various instrumental groups. Students have very good attitudes to extracurricular provision and are eager to attend rehearsals. They perform in Christmas and Easter concerts in the St. George's Centre, Gravesend, in Chatham and other local venues, where their performances are always appreciated.
176. The head of department, who has been in post for two years, provides good leadership. She has successfully raised the standard of students' attainment since the previous inspection so that overall improvement is good. Satisfactory schemes of work are now more suited to the needs of all students and appropriate assessment procedures are in place. Music is also taught as part of the A level performing arts course. Teaching methods have improved and are focused well on integrating listening tasks and practical activities. Developing the use of ICT will support further improvement. Lessons are available in a range of instruments and over 70 students attend them. Instrumental teachers do much to raise the profile of music within the school. Music makes a good contribution to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

177. Attainment on entry to the school is below national expectations. The end of Key Stage 3 teacher assessments show the majority of students achieve standards that are in line with national expectations. The proportions of students gaining A*-C and A*-G grades at the end of Key Stage 4 in 2000 are in line with national averages. Standards have improved since the previous inspection. There is no Sixth Form work to report on.

178. All students, including those with special educational needs, achieve well throughout Key Stage 3 in a variety of games activities. They continue to make progress in athletics, a range of games and swimming throughout Key Stage 4. They have additional opportunities to improve their performance through school clubs, teams and representation at county level. Although some students assist with clubs and activities for younger students, there is no formal provision for physical education in the Sixth Form.
179. Work seen during the inspection at all levels is broadly in line with national expectations. In Key Stage 3 all students acquire and develop skills in basketball and hockey. Most of them are able to select and apply appropriate skills and tactics in paired and small group activities. They are beginning to develop good evaluative skills of their own and others' performance and the majority of students are able to demonstrate a good knowledge and understanding of health and fitness. At Key Stage 4 the majority of students achieve levels that are in line with national expectations, acquiring and developing skills in basketball, hockey and netball. But their ability to apply these skills in competitive game situations is less well developed.
180. The quality of teaching and learning is good in both key stages. Before the start of each lesson agreed procedures are rigorously followed which leads to an organised and disciplined start to each lesson. Teachers have a good knowledge of the activities that they teach and their intervention leads to direct improvement with individual students. Most lessons maintain a good pace and the activities motivate the students to sustain their participation, although more attention could be given to ensuring that the higher attaining students are challenged further. Teachers have very effective working relationships with the students and regular feedback reinforces their learning. Teachers record progress at the end of each module of work in line with National Curriculum criteria. They provide good opportunities for students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding during question and answer sessions or when acting as officials in game situations; this could be extended further to include taking a lead role, for example, in warm-up sessions. PE teachers lead by example; they are enthusiastic, punctual and have high expectations that motivate the students. They give good attention to the personal and social development of the students. As a result students have very positive attitudes and high standards of appearance and participation. They co-operate well when working in pairs and small groups, often without the direct supervision of the teacher. They listen to instructions with interest and to the contributions made by their peers. They display good awareness of health and safety issues and show respect when using and carrying equipment. They develop their self-esteem and confidence.
181. The department is well led. Future developments are clearly documented in the department's plan, although the success criteria could usefully be extended to include quantitative as well as qualitative targets. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching is good. Provision for gymnastics has improved since the last inspection and the overall rationale and balance of activities offered within the curriculum have been reviewed. Provision for gymnastics is much improved. The good links with dance could also be extended to develop self-evaluation. The profile and status of physical education within the school would be further enhanced with minor improvements to the physical environment of the department's accommodation.

Dance

182. Standards in GCSE dance in 2000 were in line with national averages, although it has been consistently higher in recent years. More students are opting for dance at Key Stage 4. Standards in dance within the performing arts A level course are in line with national averages and here too more students are choosing this course. Standards of dance on entry to the school are variable. Achievement, however, is very good at both key stages and in the Sixth Form.
183. In work seen during the inspection by the end of Key Stage 3 standards are in line with, and for a significant number of students exceed, national expectations. Students have very positive

attitudes. They have high standards of kit and appearance and very high levels of active participation in lessons. Students develop a good understanding of dance vocabulary and movement patterns and are able to create and perform a range of dance styles from different countries of the world. All students have the opportunity to compose and perform solo, duet and group dances. At Key Stage 4 the students are able to choreograph and perform complex set dances as well as adapt and refine their own arrangements using advanced techniques and skills with accuracy and expression. Students in the A level group displayed high levels of mutual co-operation and support in composing and evaluating dance routines.

184. The quality of teaching is always very good and often excellent. The expertise, commitment and charisma of the teacher are infectious and motivate all the students to participate with energy and enthusiasm. Learning objectives are clearly communicated and the use of music and a variety of other stimuli captures the imagination of the students so that their interest and concentration are sustained. The regular use of video material reinforces the teacher's expectations of quality and the use of a video camera enables students to evaluate their own performance and those of others to further reinforce their learning. Regular assessments, including students' self-assessment, are recorded and used to inform option choices at the end of Key Stage 3. The high quality of teaching and learning is enhanced through the provision of dance clubs and productions within the school as well as visits to and from local and regional dance workshops.
185. Dance at Key Stage 3 meets the requirements of physical education within the National Curriculum. Standards have been maintained since the last inspection, whilst levels of participation and the take-up of examination courses have increased. The good links with the physical education department should be extended to enhance the common skills in gymnastics and dance and to share the developing good practice in self-evaluation. The use of whiteboards, the installation of wall mirrors and a review of changing arrangements would improve the learning environment.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

186. Between the ages of 11 and 16 students pursue a course of study based on the Agreed Syllabus for Kent. The school makes no provision for religious education to be studied in the Sixth Form, and nor does it offer students the option of pursuing religious studies at GCSE or GCE AS examination levels.
187. In work seen during the inspection, students at the end of both key stages attain standards well below those expected by the Agreed Syllabus for their age. Their knowledge and understanding of the richness and diversity of religion, and of the place of Christianity and other principal religions in the country, is inadequate. They have only a limited understanding of why religious beliefs are important to those who hold them, and of how their lives are shaped by them. Their grasp of religious language and concepts is weak. Their skills in applying religious insights to their own lives and to those of others, and to ethical questions, are underdeveloped.
188. Students of all levels of prior attainment achieve poorly because of three inter-related weaknesses in the school's provision for the subject. Firstly, the quality of teaching is unsatisfactory. Secondly, schemes of work are poor, and fail to ensure that what is taught meets the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. The adverse impact of these shortcomings is compounded by the inadequate time the school allocates to teaching the subject. It is below the national average at Key Stage 3 and well below at Key Stage 4. At Key Stage 4 it is far too low for students to study the Agreed Syllabus in the breadth and depth necessary for them to reach appropriate standards of attainment.
189. During the inspection week, when the head of department was absent through illness, lessons were planned by members of the senior management team, and taught both by them, and by experienced supply teachers. In the lessons observed, the quality of teaching and learning was at least satisfactory at Key Stage 3, and in the great majority of instances good. It was very

good at Key Stage 4. Where teaching was strongest, teachers had a good grasp of their subject. They knew clearly what they wished their students to learn, and planned their lessons effectively to achieve their aims. This was well evidenced, for example in a Year 8 lesson on the challenging concept of Trimurti in Hinduism. Students were led to a good understanding of the attributes of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva through a carefully structured sequence of clear explanation, skilled questioning, reading, discussion and written work, reinforced by good use of visual images.

190. Teachers have high expectations of students, and stretch them intellectually through a variety of imaginative and challenging activities and tasks, which are well matched to their individual needs. For example, Year 10 students of all levels of prior attainment made very good gains in understanding issues relating to free-will and personal morality, through exploring case studies of typical moral dilemmas faced by young people. Year 9 students' understanding of the factors in the spread of Christianity in the Roman Empire was reinforced and extended through an interesting multi-choice quiz. Other Year 9 students made good gains in understanding the beliefs of different Christian denominations through paired matching statement exercises, and whole class discussion of the outcomes of their work.
191. Teachers manage time well, and maintain a brisk pace in lessons. They manage their students' behaviour very well, and enjoy very good relationships with them, creating a secure ethos in the classroom in which students feel able to discuss sensitive issues. Judicious use of praise does much to raise students' self esteem.
192. Scrutiny of students' work, however, shows that prior to the inspection week, the quality of teaching has been unsatisfactory and learning poor over an extended period of time. Lessons have not been well planned to ensure the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus are fully met. Expectations have also been too low, and activities and tasks have not been well matched to the differing needs of students. Students of all levels of prior attainment have not been sufficiently challenged, and have therefore not made the progress over time of which they are capable.
193. Even when allowances have been made for the low time allocation, students have been given too few opportunities to engage in writing for a variety of purposes and audiences. They have therefore been unable to develop the interpretative, analytical and evaluative skills relevant to the subject to appropriate levels. They have also been given too few opportunities to develop their skills of independent research and enquiry, and of writing at length. Insufficient attention has been given to the development of basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information technology. Marking has been supportive but has not helped students to understand how to raise the levels of their attainment.
194. Despite the deficiencies in the school's provision for the subject, the attitude of students towards the subject is good when good teaching challenges them. They listen well, and sustain concentration well in a range of contexts. They are responsive orally, and listen with respect to each other's views and opinions, for example, when discussing ethical issues in Year 10. Their behaviour is very good, and they enjoy very good relationships with each other and with their teachers, based on mutual respect and caring. They are courteous and friendly towards visitors to the classroom.
195. The weaknesses identified in the previous inspection have not been effectively addressed, and improvement since the previous report has been poor. Standards have remained as low as previously at Key Stage 4, and have fallen further at Key Stage 3. The lack of challenge identified in teaching has not been effectively addressed, and the overall quality of teaching is lower. Schemes of work have not been developed for the new Agreed Syllabus introduced in September 2000. Assessment procedures are still unsatisfactory because they are not related to the attainment targets and levels of the Agreed Syllabus. The time allocated to teaching the Agreed Syllabus is still too low at Key Stage 3, and inadequate at Key Stage 4, while there is still no provision in the Sixth Form.

196. The quality of leadership and management of the subject is poor, although the school has done much to support and develop the head of department professionally over an extended period of time. The school and its governing body are aware of the weaknesses in its provision for the subject, and are committed to raising standards. If the school is to do so it should make better provision of time for the full requirements of the Agreed Syllabus to be taught to all students. It should also review its staffing provision with a view to raising the quality of management and the quality of teaching and learning.

BUSINESS EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL COURSES

197. The school provides a variety of vocational courses in Key Stage 4, including business studies, child development, maternal and child welfare and a vocational access course. There is also a wide range of general national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) in the Sixth Form to meet the aspirations of students. At Key Stage 4, the proportion of A*-G grades in business studies is above the national average but the proportion of A*-C grades is below. However, the results for both GCSE business studies and child development show an increasing improvement over the last few years. Students achieve results in business studies and child development that compare favourably with the results achieved in other subjects they take. In the Sixth Form the overall pass rate of both the advanced and intermediate GNVQs is well above the national average. At foundation level it is below. At all three levels the majority of students achieve a pass or merit grade; there are few achieving the higher distinction grade.
198. At the end of Key Stage 4 standards are in line with the national average but improving because practical activities in lessons make knowledge more accessible for students. However whilst the majority of activities reinforce students' understanding, in a few lessons seen, work did not take account of the needs of all students and a small minority struggled with general and technical vocabulary. In the Sixth Form students' work is showing improvement as they begin to achieve merit rather than pass grades. They use their prior knowledge to help them make sense of new learning and they are prepared to ask and answer questions. This helps to reinforce their understanding. For example, the Advanced GNVQ Business students use their knowledge from previous units on race relations and discrimination law to help make sense of their new unit on Business and the Law. Standards in communications skills are an improvement since the last inspection and all business GNVQ students, for example, have completed and passed all three key skills of communication, application of number and information technology.
199. In the majority of lessons seen teaching is good. In both Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form teachers' knowledge of their subject is good and they are well matched to the aspects they teach. In business studies, for example, at Key Stage 4 they use a good range of teaching and learning strategies, which ensures that knowledge is accessible by a significant majority of students. For example, good questioning to tease out students' understanding is followed by a short but fun practical activity to help them understand how people are rewarded for their work. This 'real' activity produced some lively discussion that consolidated their learning. Students' work is now marked to the GCSE assessment criteria which is helping the department to improve their feedback to students. As a result they understand better what they need to do to improve. In both Key Stage 4 and the Sixth Form where teaching is good there is a good ethos for learning, the pace and lesson structure help to keep students enthusiastic and working hard and good humour holds the interest of the students. Instructions are clear and students know what is expected of them. These features have a positive effect on motivation and attitudes to learning. However, clear deadlines are not always set for the completion of tasks to ensure that the pace of learning is consistently good. There are not enough opportunities for students in Key Stage 4 to work collaboratively, to take part in decision making activities in order to enhance their learning.
200. Since the last inspection the school has greatly increased the number of vocational qualifications for both students in Key Stage 4 and in the Sixth Form. The business department evaluates and monitors its teaching and teachers learn from each other. Their collective

commercial experiences benefit both pre- and post-16 students because the teachers bring their personal knowledge into their teaching. For example, one of the teachers until recently worked for a large international retail store and is able to bring her experience of management and retail into her teaching. As a result the attainment of students in Key Stage 4, in business studies for example, continues to improve. In the Sixth Form the proportion of GNVQ students completing their course is above that nationally.

201. In order to improve further the provision for business and vocational qualifications, students in the Sixth Form need to be well supported in order to meet the standards required for higher level grades in GNVQ. The business department development plan should show some measurable targets for school improvement in order to assess success. Teachers should continue to mark to the GCSE assessment criteria in order to help students' improve. Classroom materials should be better matched to meet the needs of all students in Key Stage 4.