

INSPECTION REPORT

NORTH CHADDERTON SCHOOL

Chadderton

Oldham

LEA area: Oldham

Unique reference number: 105737

Headteacher: Mr P C Hayes

Reporting inspector: Mr R C Drew
7281

Dates of inspection: 12th – 16th February 2001

Inspection number: 187879

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 18
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Chadderton Hall Road Chadderton Oldham
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr L Hindle
Date of previous inspection:	29 th April 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
7281	R Drew	Registered inspector		<p>What sort of school is it?</p> <p>The school's results and achievements</p> <p>How well are pupils taught?</p> <p>How well is the school led and managed?</p> <p>What should the school do to improve further?</p>
9710	R Burgess	Lay inspector		<p>Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development</p> <p>How well does the school care for its pupils?</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
14596	A Fiddian-Green	Team inspector	<p>Religious Education</p> <p>Special Educational Needs</p>	
18447	R Cohen	Team inspector	<p>History</p> <p>GNVQ</p> <p>Curriculum</p>	<p>How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils or students?</p>
19586	W Easterby	Team inspector	English	

4676	M Griffiths	Team inspector	Physical Education	
10209	V Gormally	Team inspector	Art and design	
10727	R Humphries	Team inspector	Design and Technology	
8341	W Wimshurst	Team inspector	Mathematics	
21785	V Kerr	Team inspector	Science English as an additional language	
16950	C Orr	Team inspector	Modern Languages Equal Opportunities	
4689	M Christian	Team inspector	Information and Communication Technology	
7222	A Watson	Team inspector	Music	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

North Chadderton School is a large 11 to 18 comprehensive school with 1547 pupils on roll, including 206 sixth form students. It serves a mixed urban and suburban area of Oldham, comprised of privately owned and local authority housing. Social and economic background data indicate a slightly more advantaged catchment than found nationally. About 96 per cent of pupils are white and of UK heritage, while pupils of Pakistani heritage amount to just over one per cent of the total, and those of Bangladeshi background just under one per cent. Thirty-six pupils use English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils claiming free school meals, at 8.3 per cent, is less than half the national average

About 7.5 per cent of pupils are on the special educational needs register, less than half the national proportion, of whom 43 are at stages 3 to 5 of the Code of Practice, and eight pupils have statements. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school covers a wide range, but overall it is just above average.

The school operates on two sites a mile apart, and this feature continues to influence all aspects of the school administration. Since the previous inspection of 1996, the school has had major changes in leadership, with a new headteacher and a substantially new senior management structure.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This school is a good school. It is very well led and managed, and has made good improvement since the previous inspection. Standards at GCSE and post 16 are above national averages, and teaching is good. Pupils achieve well overall and show very positive attitudes. The school provides good value for money.

What the school does well

- Leadership by the headteacher and other senior managers is very good.
- Teaching and learning are good for the school as whole, and very good in several areas.
- Pupils' attitudes to school are very good and behaviour is good.
- Attainment is above average for 14, 16 and 18 year olds.
- Pupils make good progress in lessons and achieve well from year to year.
- The school offers pupils a very good range of extra-curricular activities.
- Departmental management is excellent in physical education, and very good in art, history, religious education, information and communication technology (ICT) and special educational needs.
- Moral, social and cultural provision are all good.

What could be improved

- Accommodation is unsatisfactory, with too few design and technology rooms, unsuitable science laboratories, and constant inefficiencies stemming from the split-site arrangements.
- Management is unsatisfactory in the science and mathematics departments, and in science teaching is unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9.
- Numeracy provision across the curriculum is unsatisfactory.
- There is some inconsistency in the way a minority of staff uses assessment data and homework.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in April/May 1996 and has made good improvements since then. It has kept GCSE results high and raised A-level standards, and, apart from the Act of Worship requirements, it now meets statutory requirements within the curriculum. Great strides have been made in improving assessment arrangements, the management of departments and in widening teaching styles. Improvement is evident in most subjects in the way that work set for pupils is matched to their needs. Teaching quality has improved: in 97 per cent of lessons seen, teaching is now at least satisfactory, compared with 90 per cent at the time of the previous inspection.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	A	C	B	C	well above average A average above average B average C below average D well below average E
A/AS examinations	D	C	C	N/a	very low E *

By the age of 14, pupils' combined results in National Curriculum tests are above average compared with all schools. They are well above average in English, above average in mathematics and in line with national standards in science. Compared with schools in the same free school meals category, standards are average. Evidence gained during the inspection indicates that standards amongst current pupils aged 14 are above average in English, mathematics, physical education, art, design and technology, ICT and music; they broadly match national standards in all other subjects.

Amongst pupils aged 16, results are above average compared to those for all schools, both in terms of GCSE points scores and the proportion of A* to C passes. They are average compared to similar schools. Since the previous inspection, average points scores have remained close to 40 points, but the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades has varied between 53 and 61 per cent. This largely reflects the prior attainment of different year groups. The school meets or exceeds its GCSE targets.

In the work of 16 year olds seen during the inspection, standards were well above average in art and design and above average in English, mathematics, science, business studies, design and technology, ICT, modern languages, music and physical education. They matched national averages in history, geography and religious education. Girls' standards are generally higher than those of boys, with the gap being similar to the national one.

Given slightly above average prior attainment for pupils in English, mathematics and science tests, and broadly average standards on entry in most other subjects, the standards reached at age 14 represent satisfactory achievement in Years 7 to 9. By the age of 16, pupils have made good overall achievement.

Achievement up to the age of 14 is good in art, design and technology, ICT, physical education, music and religious education and satisfactory in all other subjects. Up to the age of 16, achievement is good in all subjects except science, geography and mathematics, where it is satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs achieve in line with other pupils. Above-average attainers and pupils with English as an additional language are not monitored as identifiable groups and no separate judgements can be made on their achievement.

For students aged 18, results in A and AS examinations matched the national average in 2000, having risen considerably over the last few years. Results in 2000 were particularly strong in art, biology, chemistry, English literature, economics and physics. Results were noticeably lower than the school average in German, psychology and sociology. In the work seen during the inspection, standards were well above average in art, ICT, and business studies and above average in science, music, history, design and technology and psychology. Standards were average in geography, mathematics, modern languages and religious education, and below average in English. Students enter the sixth form with widely varied prior attainment, and they achieve well. Achievement is very good in art, ICT and business studies, good in most other subjects and satisfactory in geography, modern languages and English. Students with special educational needs make good progress.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. The great majority of pupils are unusually positive about school and attend well. They are quick to take up opportunities to be involved in clubs, societies and other school activities. They are proud to follow the school dress code.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. The vast majority of pupils behave very well in lessons and around school. Behaviour in assemblies and in the dining hall is particularly good. A very small minority is inclined to behave less well, but, with very few exceptions, teachers prevent poor behaviour from developing.
Personal development and relationships	Good. Pupils mature while in school and show good awareness of how their actions affect others and why they should respect the feeling and beliefs of others. Pupils form very good relationships with each other and with staff.
Attendance	Above average. Attendance rates are high, but the site leads to too much lateness to lessons.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	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 the school is good, and its quality has improved since the previous inspection of 1996. About 97 per cent of lessons seen had teaching which was at least satisfactory; it was good in 46 per cent, very good in 21 per cent and excellent in four per cent of lessons. About 3.5 per cent of lessons had less than satisfactory teaching.

In Years 7 to 9, satisfactory or better teaching accounts for 92 per cent of lessons seen, while in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, all teaching was at least satisfactory. The excellent teaching was most noticeable in Years 10 to 13, and the unsatisfactory teaching was concentrated in Year 9. Otherwise, teaching is very similar throughout the school.

English teaching is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, very good for Years 10 and 11, and good in the sixth form; mathematics teaching is satisfactory across Years 7 to 11 and good in the sixth form, while science is unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9, satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 and good in the sixth form. Amongst the other subjects, teaching quality is good in most subjects and very good in Years 10 and 11 in English and business studies, and in the sixth form in art, design and technology and ICT. In Years 7 to 9, it is satisfactory in design and technology and geography, with the latter remaining satisfactory through to Year 13.

Across the school, the strengths of teaching are the high quality of relationships, the subject expertise of teachers and the generally high expectations they have of pupils. Confidence in developing basic skills, especially numeracy, is adequate. In Years 7 to 9, the use of homework and of assessment data is good in some subjects but barely satisfactory in others.

Pupils' learning is good throughout the school. Most pupils concentrate well, work at a good speed and show strong interest in their work. Some of these features are particularly well developed in the sixth form, where students' attitudes are very positive.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. There is good breadth to the curriculum, and it is enhanced by very good extra-curricular provision. Timetabling inefficiencies due to the split site and a lack of balance within design and technology detract from its overall quality. Numeracy provision is unsatisfactory.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Satisfactory. The special educational needs department is well managed, but there is a need for more in-class support, and for more consistent help for pupils in some subjects.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Good. There is satisfactory scope for spiritual development and good provision for pupils' moral, and cultural development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good. The school has good arrangements for giving guidance and support to pupils; academic achievement is monitored well in most departments, but less effectively so in a minority.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The head and other key staff lead very well and have motivated the staff to make significant improvement since the previous inspection.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Good. Key governors are well informed about the school's strengths and weaknesses. They give good support over strategic planning and aspects of ongoing financial and accommodation issues. Statutory duties are satisfactorily met.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. The school is perceptive and realistic about analysing past performance and agreeing ways forward.
The strategic use of resources	This is very good. Planning is clear and secure in its priorities. Finances are particularly well managed, so that all receive appropriate funding.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<p>A very high proportion of parents believes that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the school expects pupils to work hard and do their best; the school is approachable; teaching is good; their children make good progress; their children like school; behaviour is good; the school is well led and managed. 	<p>A minority of parents feel that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> homework arrangements are unsatisfactory; they are not sufficiently well informed about their children's progress; the school does not work closely enough with them; only a limited range of extra-curricular activities is provided.

Inspectors' evidence supports the high level of confidence parents have in so many aspects of the school's work. Where a minority of parents expresses some dissatisfaction, inspectors share the concern of inconsistency in the use of homework in Years 7 to 9; they find, however, that information to parents, other lines of communication with parents and the scope for parents to become involved in school life are all good. The extra-curricular provision of the school is well above average.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. Pupils enter the school with a wide range of prior attainment which, on balance, is slightly above the national average. Scores from National Curriculum tests conducted in the last year of primary school show that their knowledge and skills in aspects of English, mathematics and science are better than those found nationally. However, this is not fully matched by the findings of other nationally recognised assessments made early in Year 7, or by inspectors' judgements on the work of current Year 7 pupils, both of which suggest broadly average attainment on entry.
2. By the age of 14, pupils' combined results in National Curriculum tests are above average compared with all schools. Compared with schools in the same free school meals category, standards are average.
3. In English, test results show well above average standards in 2000. This represents an upward trend since 1997. Standards in the work seen during the inspection are above average: current Year 9 pupils are generally strongest in the quality of their reading and their ability to write in a range of different genres; their spelling is relatively less well developed. Test results in mathematics have been above average for the last four years compared with all schools, but well below average for similar schools. Inspection evidence shows that standards amongst 14 year olds are currently above average, with pupils better at graphical and data-handling skills than they are at using and applying mathematics to solve problems. Results in science tests in 2000 were average when compared with all schools and well below average when compared with similar schools, and this indicates a downward trend over the last three years. Inspection evidence suggests that standards amongst current 14 year olds are broadly average: their practical and investigative skills are good, and so is their ability to absorb new knowledge. However, there is often a lack of continuity between science lessons on any one topic, and pupils have difficulty in retaining, and building cumulatively on, this knowledge.
4. Evidence gained during the inspection indicates that standards amongst current pupils aged 14 are above average in English, mathematics, physical education, art, design and technology, ICT and music, and broadly match national standards in all other subjects. Girls' attainment amongst 14 year olds is similar overall to that of boys. It is much higher in English tests, but lower in those for mathematics and science.
5. Given slightly above average prior attainment for pupils in English, mathematics and science tests, and broadly average standards on entry in most other subjects, the standards reached at age 14 represent satisfactory achievement in Years 7 to 9. Achievement up to the age of 14 is good in art, design and technology, ICT, music, physical education and religious education and satisfactory in all other subjects. Pupils with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily: they make good gains during withdrawal sessions, but there are relatively few support assistants to help them in lessons. They achieve well when their progress is measured against the targets set out in individual education plans organised by most of the subject teachers. However, these targets are not always reported to the special needs co-ordinator for review purposes. These factors hold achievement across Years 7 to 9 at a satisfactory level. In Years 10 and 11 pupils with special educational needs are generally in setted groups, and they progress well despite a lack of support assistants.

6. Amongst pupils aged 16, results are above average compared with those for all schools, both in terms of GCSE points scores and the proportion of A* to C passes. They are average compared with similar schools. Since the previous inspection, average points scores have remained close to 40 points, and the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades has varied between 53 and 61 per cent, largely reflecting the prior attainment of different year groups.
7. In the work of 16 year olds seen during the inspection, standards were well above average in art and above average in English, mathematics, science, history, business studies, design and technology, ICT, modern languages, music and physical education. They matched national averages in geography and religious education. Girls' standards are generally higher than those of boys, with the gap being similar to the national one.
8. Achievement up to the age of 16 is good overall. Pupils consistently make good progress in lessons, and by the time they finish compulsory schooling they have made good gains on the knowledge and skills with which they entered the school. The school meets and sometimes exceeds its GCSE targets, which are high when set against pupils' test scores in Year 7. Pupils make good achievements in English, physical education, history, art, ICT, design and technology, modern languages, religious education and music. In science, geography and mathematics, achievement is satisfactory. Pupils with special educational needs, above-average attainers and pupils with English as an additional language also achieve well. Pupils with English as an additional language have good enough language skills in English to progress in line with pupils as a whole.
9. For students aged 18, results in A and AS examinations matched the national average in 2000, having risen considerably over the last few years. The average points score in 1996 was 14.0 and this had risen to 18.1 in 2000, almost exactly the national figure. In the work seen during the inspection, overall standards for students aged 18 were above average.
10. Standards were well above average in art, ICT, and business studies. They were above average in history, design and technology, music, psychology and science. In mathematics, geography, modern languages and religious education, standards are average, and in English, they are just below average.
11. Students enter the sixth form with widely varied prior attainment, since open entry is encouraged. The standards they reach indicate that good overall achievement is taking place. In some subjects, it is particularly strong: it is very good in art, ICT and business studies, and good in history, mathematics, science, psychology, music, religious education and design and technology. Students make satisfactory achievements in geography, English and modern languages. Students with special educational needs make good progress.
12. The variations in standards and achievement largely reflect the quality of teaching and departmental management, but some historical factors also apply. In several subjects, all these influences have been consistently positive for several years: in physical education, art, business studies, ICT and design and technology, this is the case across all year groups. In a few others, most of these factors apply. For example, in history, added value is consistently high, but standards of attainment for 16 year olds is lower than might be expected, because fewer of the higher attainers than usual chose the subject in 2000. In the sixth form, standards in English are lower than the quality of teaching and current leadership would suggest, but this reflects previous arrangements not yet tackled by a new head of department. Where new strategies have been applied – in GCSE teaching and tests for 14 year olds, for example – standards have risen. In mathematics and science, the unfavourable comparison with standards in similar

schools and the decline in science test results for 14 year olds are consistent with unsatisfactory management of these subjects, and teaching which lacks the consistent high quality found elsewhere in the school. These two subjects and geography make less use of assessment data and classroom monitoring than most other departments, although individual teachers often take the initiative to use these strategies well.

13. Overall standards have been maintained since the last inspection. Amongst 14 year olds, they have risen in English, but shown a recent decline in mathematics and science. For pupils aged 16, results have varied in line with prior attainment, but there has been good added value each year. In the sixth form, results have improved markedly since the last inspection.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

14. Pupils' have very good attitudes to school and their standards of behaviour are good. Pupils' ability to show initiative and demonstrate personal responsibility are good, and relationships in the school are very good.
15. In most lessons throughout the school, pupils are interested and keen to learn. In the best lessons, they are highly motivated, as in a Year 9 volleyball lesson which overran into pupils' own time because of their involvement, and in a Year 10 religious education lesson, where good initiative was shown in answering questions during a discussion on euthanasia. However, in a small number of lessons, particularly in Year 9, but also in Years 8 and 10, a minority of boys are inattentive, lack concentration and disrupt the lesson for others. Often, but not always, this is a direct result of poor class control by the teachers. In two English lessons in Year 9, the boys were passive, showing little interest or motivation, and completed little work. Students who stay into the sixth form are consistently well motivated, become fully absorbed in their lessons and demonstrate a high commitment to their studies. In an ICT lesson, students shared ideas and knowledge generously and in an art class showed good, creative self-confidence and maturity.
16. Participation in extra-curricular activities is very good, particularly in music and sport. Pupils are keen to represent the school in sporting activities and are acknowledged as good ambassadors for the school, for example, in the recent English schools soccer championships.
17. Standards of behaviour are good. Pupils of all ages are well mannered and sensible. Movement around the school is good, even in narrow corridors and stairways. Pupils in the lower school, who walk between the two sites for lessons, do so responsibly without supervision. Behaviour in assemblies and in the lunch hour is generally very good. In most lessons, behaviour is often very good, apart from a small number of boys in Years 8, 9 and 10, whose attitude is immature and behaviour poor and who do not respond to their teachers.
18. There is an absence of oppressive behaviour and when bullying occurs it is dealt with effectively. Pupils are excluded for short, fixed periods for aggressive or violent behaviour that disrupts the learning of other pupils. The number of these exclusions is very low for a school of this size. Pupils of all ages understand the impact of their actions on others. They are capable of showing respect for others' feelings, values and beliefs. Year 7 showed an ability to co-operate well in an ICT lesson using computers, and in a Year 11 music lesson, pupils showed great respect for others' performances. Pupils value the system of rewards and recognise the need for sanctions.
19. Relationships in the school are very good, both between groups of pupils and between pupils and teachers. Personal development of all pupils is good. Excellent relationships are evident in lessons, such as in a Year 10 music lesson where

collaboration was particularly marked. Pupils' ability to show initiative and exercise personal responsibility is generally good and is best in creative lessons, especially music, physical education and art. Sixth form students exercise their responsibilities as prefects well. A small number of Year 11 and 12 pupils undertake the role of mentors for Year 7 pupils, which has a positive impact on the younger pupils' progress, particularly in reading.

20. Attendance is good and has improved in line with that seen nationally. Both authorised and unauthorised absences are broadly in line with national averages. Authorised absences include a number of authorised family holidays taken during term-time which can affect learning. Pupils with long-term health problems are supported well by the school. A small number of pupils have unsatisfactory attendance records. The punctuality of most pupils is good, but there are persistent problems with a small minority of pupils, sometimes but not always, related to problems with buses. Pupils generally arrive promptly for lessons during the school day.
21. Since the last inspection, very good attitudes to school and good standards of behaviour have been maintained. Good attendance rates have been sustained.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

22. Teaching in the school is good, and there is much which is very good. Of the lessons seen during the inspection, 97.5 per cent had at least satisfactory teaching; in four per cent it was excellent, in 22 per cent it was very good, and in 46 per cent it was good. Pupils learn well in all year groups.
23. The very small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching and learning was dispersed amongst a range of subjects, but concentrated in Year 9 lessons.
24. For pupils in Years 7 to 9, the quality of teaching broadly matches the picture for the school as a whole and it is good overall. About 92 per cent of lessons have satisfactory or better teaching, with two per cent in which the quality is excellent, 12 per cent where it is very good and 42 per cent with good teaching. There is, therefore, slightly less very good teaching than for the school as a whole, and the proportion of unsatisfactory teaching, at eight per cent, is higher.
25. Teachers in Years 7 to 9 show good subject knowledge across the whole curriculum. It is very good in some lessons, while in a minority of situations, when staff teach outside their specialist areas, subject expertise is satisfactory rather than strong.
26. Management of pupils is also good and operates on the basis of very positive relationships in the vast majority of lessons. A Year 7 French lesson on pupils' likes and dislikes illustrated the beneficial effect of both features, because the teacher's confidence in oral language work enabled her to involve the class in a significant amount of speaking, and the pupils' enthusiastic response owed a lot to the teacher's friendly, very positive style. Expectations are high in most lessons, and are partly responsible for the above-average standards of attainment reached by pupils when they are 14.
27. There is scope for standards to be even higher, since some aspects of teaching are satisfactory as opposed to good or very good. Numeracy teaching, for instance, has yet to make its expected impact; planning virtually always ensures a well-structured lesson, but sometimes lacks sufficient matching of tasks to the varied needs of pupils. A minority of lessons, particularly in science, geography and mathematics, also show limited use of assessment to gauge pupils' current levels of understanding. More often,

however, this is done satisfactorily. Similarly, homework is set sufficiently frequently by most teachers, but there is inconsistency amongst a minority.

28. Across Years 7 to 9 teaching is good in the majority of subjects. This is true for art, history, physical education, modern languages, ICT, music and religious education. It is satisfactory in English, mathematics, geography and design and technology. In science, the quality of teaching is unsatisfactory: while there is some fine teaching, too many lessons have planning, expectations and management of pupils which are below those typical of the school.
29. Pupils' learning in Years 7 to 9 is generally good, reflecting the prevalence of strong teaching and the very positive attitudes to school found amongst the vast majority of pupils. The only exception to this is a minority of Year 9 pupils who seek to be disruptive, but who are handled very effectively by most teachers. Pupils are satisfactorily aware of the standards to which they should be working, but this feature could be improved: it is, for instance, much stronger amongst Year 10 and 11 pupils. Pupils with special educational needs also learn satisfactorily, but this can only improve when there is greater provision of support in class.
30. For pupils in Years 10 and 11, teaching is good, but it has slightly more strengths than teaching amongst Years 7 to 9. As a result, about three per cent of lessons have excellent teaching, 29 per cent very good teaching and 49 per cent good teaching. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Teachers' subject expertise is consistently very good, and there are only rare exceptions to a pattern of well-organised lessons typified by good relationships and accurate use of assessment. The use of setting and the increased awareness of variations in aptitude within teaching groups enable teachers to set work which matches pupils' needs more effectively than in Years 7 to 9. The teaching of basic skills, especially numeracy, remains less effective than other features of teaching, but it is satisfactory compared with national practice.
31. Pupils' learning in Years 10 and 11 is good. There are strong features, shared with the younger pupils, such as good concentration and high levels of interest. In addition, Year 10 and 11 pupils are well informed about their current and expected levels of attainment, and this helps to focus their efforts and provide challenge. Pupils with special educational needs learn well, largely because in Years 10 and 11 teachers are more consistently good at gauging and setting work of appropriate challenge.
32. In some subjects in Years 10 and 11, teaching is particularly effective. It is very good in English and business studies; it is good in history, art, physical education, design and technology, ICT, modern languages, music and religious education. In mathematics, science and geography teaching is satisfactory.
33. Teaching in the sixth form is good and a significant proportion is very good. About nine per cent of sixth form lessons seen had excellent teaching, 30 per cent had very good teaching and in 49 per cent it was good. No lessons had unsatisfactory teaching. Most lessons benefited from high-quality, specialist teaching which built on very good relationships. Lessons were also consistently efficient: without sacrificing a pleasant atmosphere, the teaching was very well paced and structured so that the most was extracted from each session. Teaching was very good in sixth form art, design and technology, ICT and business studies. It was good in English, mathematics, science, history, modern languages and psychology. In geography, teaching was satisfactory.
34. Students learn well, and often very well, in the sixth form. Many enter Year 12 with lower grades at GCSE than is common in other 11 to 18 schools, but this is compensated for by the quality of teaching and the very positive attitudes that the students bring to lessons and to school life in general. Their learning is characterised by good concentration, a willingness to listen carefully and respond readily, and good

study skills. The very small minority of students with special educational needs learn very well, helped by this very positive climate for learning.

35. When the many strengths of teaching and learning come together, some fine lessons ensue. For instance, in a Year 13 art lesson on ceramics projects, the teacher showed impressive skill in analysing students' work, an understanding of specific examination board requirements and the links between the two. Areas for improvement were suggested sensitively, clearly based on sound evidence. Students showed excellent attitudes, were able to derive the full benefit of the teacher's input and were confident in discussing issues. In a Year 11 science lesson on electromagnetic waves, the teaching was excellent. Very clear objectives were set at the start and the session proceeded briskly, with extremely effective questioning of pupils to test and develop their knowledge. Pupils worked individually, in groups and as a whole class on tasks closely matching their needs and interests. The teacher made very good use of resources and equipment, especially overhead projector slides. Pupils' attitudes and learning were excellent, with interesting and challenging work to involve them throughout, and a clear understanding that they needed to think for themselves and take responsibility for completing tasks.
36. Similar strengths were evident in a well-taught Year 11 history lesson on Germany between 1918 and 1920. It was carefully planned, conducted with pace and variety, thoroughly evaluated and built on pupils' previous knowledge. In a Year 9 physical education lesson with excellent teaching, volleyball skills were very successfully improved by a fine combination of confident, clear explanations and a supportive yet demanding approach to participation by pupils.
37. When teaching is less successful, the skills of planning based on pupils' prior knowledge and of gaining positive responses through appropriate tasks are less well developed. For example, in a Year 7 science lesson on liquids, there was insufficient awareness of pupils' previous knowledge and too little matching of work to their differing needs. Management of pupils showed poor knowledge of them as individuals, and involved giving instructions while they were still talking. In an unsatisfactory geography lesson, two different regions of Brazil were compared. There was a poor start, with pupils entering the room before the teacher, and their social conversations were not curtailed effectively when the teacher began what was, in other respects, a well-planned lesson.
38. Almost all teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs is undertaken in ordinary subject lessons. Where there is help from a learning support assistant, it is usually good, but there are lessons across the range of the curriculum where no assistant is available. In most lessons, additional work is provided by the teacher, but this is inconsistent when taken across the whole range of subjects. The personal development of students with special educational needs is good, and they are well supported by good educational plans, especially where behavioural difficulties exist. Support assistants keep good records of what these pupils do when they receive extra help.

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

39. The curriculum for Years 7 to 9 has satisfactory breadth and balance and the curriculum fulfils statutory requirements. It has improved significantly since the previous inspection, when it was narrower and failed to meet statutory requirements in religious education and design and technology. Pupils are taught all the subjects of the National Curriculum together with religious education and personal and social education. Curriculum 2000 has given the school opportunities to be innovative in its use of the National Curriculum to broaden provision. For example, there is an opportunity for all pupils in Year 9 to study a second language. Pupils have discrete lessons in drama, and in art pupils have opportunities to work in two and three dimensions, as well as studying art history. There is some cross-curricular mapping of ICT, and some subjects, such as mathematics and art, make a considerable contribution. There are, however, some weaknesses in provision at this stage of pupils' learning. Several subjects, such as English, history and geography, do not offer sufficient opportunities for pupils to use ICT. In design and technology, there is an imbalance in the teaching of different aspects, particularly food and textiles. This is due to a shortage of appropriate rooms and lack of appropriate expertise. In physical education, there is no dance provision for boys.
40. Provision for Years 10 and 11 is satisfactorily broad and balanced. In addition to studying the core subjects, pupils select from a wide range of National Curriculum options, which include humanities, arts and music, together with economics and business studies. The school effectively meets the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education at this stage by offering a core short course to all pupils in Years 10 and 11. The very small number of pupils who do not follow this short course have a lesson in religious studies every week. However, the National Curriculum requirements for ICT are met only for the 40 per cent of pupils who study the subject at GCSE. There are, as yet, no vocational courses as an effective alternative curriculum for those pupils for whom a full GCSE programme might be unsuitable.
41. The curriculum provided for pupils with special educational needs is satisfactory. Learning support assistants, when available, work closely with those who need extra help. For pupils with statements of special educational needs, annual reviews provide a good focus for improvement. There is a commitment to equality of opportunity and inclusion for all. Most subject teachers provide targets for individual education plans, but there is no consistent organisation for these, or for the review of them. Many subjects produce targets aimed at facts, rather than focusing on the skills that are required to learn them. However, provision for gifted and talented pupils, while a focus of current plans, is still underdeveloped.
42. Sixth form provision, with over 25 subjects offered at A-level, is wide. It includes sociology, psychology, business studies, government and politics and media studies. Students' interests are catered for as efficiently as possible. For example, the small number who wish to study music are offered twilight provision. In addition, students continue to engage in courses to enhance their personal development. There is also an effective enrichment programme which includes study skills and time management, as well as diverse activities ranging from sports to video and newspaper production. Sufficient time is devoted to religious education by way of a series of one-day conferences throughout the year. Regular opportunities are also available in the lunch time for optional physical education activities, and take-up is high. The school does not offer any subjects at GNVQ.

43. Although numeracy provision does not yet contribute effectively to curriculum enhancement, literacy does: it is taught well both during term time and in extended provision, such as that offered in the summer school, and it is beginning to have a good impact on raising standards.
44. Provision for personal, social and health education is satisfactory. Tutors have responsibility, with assistant year co-ordinators, for teaching a programme to all pupils which includes work on relationships, the environment and citizenship. Good provision is made for some elements of the programme, especially for health education. Teaching is satisfactory, but varies from tutor to tutor. Some lack the expertise to approach this area differently from their main subject, and the time available is limited to 45 minutes at the start of Monday mornings. Best practice has not been shared and the importance of the subject is not fully recognised by all tutors. There is good provision for careers education and guidance. The careers service is effective and is used well to provide both careers guidance and education and a work-experience placement.
45. Links with the community make a sound contribution to pupils' education. Commercial organisations in the area enable all students in Year 10 to undertake a two-week work placement. External speakers contribute well when they are brought in and students have been involved in Young Enterprise schemes in the sixth form. Opportunities to undertake service in the community are fewer than in the past. Some local, elderly people miss the regular visits which pupils used to make. Good transfer arrangements ensure a smooth transition from primary to secondary school with initiatives in several curriculum areas, especially mathematics, to ensure that continuous progress can be made.
46. The extra-curricular provision is very good and is a strength of the school. The wide range of activities contributes successfully to pupils' experiences. There are 13 different sporting activities, which are very well supported, wherein pupils can learn new skills, attend events and participate in competitive team games. The programme is arranged with open access so that pupils of all abilities can contribute and gain from the experience. Music and drama are strong, with choir, orchestra, instrumental groups, and school productions. The school has a reputation for encouraging pupils in the performing arts area and many of them are regularly included in the city drama company events. In its first year of existence, the drama group, which has over 50 participants, recently won the local area final of a regional competition. Activities linked to literacy are very good, and some are beginning to support numeracy. There is a flourishing video club, Year 8 pupils have researched and written a booklet about the town history, now published and accepted by the Manchester archives, pupils compile the school newspaper and the maths club enters the Manchester mathematics challenge each year. The chess club plays in the local league and is attended by many of the lower school pupils. The library and workshops are open at all times so that pupils can undertake book and Internet research and catch up with coursework. During study leave in May, pupils in Year 11 can join the drop-in groups to have revision sessions with teachers. All three levels of the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme are offered. All year groups have regular outings to places of interest or sites of geographical significance or natural beauty. Pupils have opportunities to go on weekend trips, adventure weeks and holidays abroad. There is a German exchange arrangement and pupils regularly speak to foreign students over the Internet and by e-mail. Visitors from other faiths, artists and craftspeople, poets, dancers and musicians visit the school to share their knowledge and skills with the pupils, who appreciate their expertise. Teachers freely give up their time to provide interesting and safe activities.

The school ensures that no pupils are excluded from any activity because of lack of skill, prior knowledge or funding.

47. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is good. Provision for spiritual development is satisfactory. The teaching of religious education provides opportunities for pupils to reflect on the deeper aspects of life and to consider how these have been addressed by the major world faiths. For example, in a lesson on arguments for the existence of God, pupils examined beliefs and worship in six world religions. Such curriculum areas as English, science, history, art and music make only a limited contribution to the pupils' spiritual development. The impact on the pupils' spiritual development of 'Thought for the Week' is patchy, and in assemblies, opportunities for a spiritual content and reflection are being missed.
48. The school makes good provision for the pupils' moral development. The school's ethos, expressed in many of its policies, promotes honesty, fairness and respect. All pupils are taught the difference between right and wrong, and are encouraged to consider how their actions and behaviour might affect other pupils and adults in the school community. All adults in the school provide good role models. Pupils discuss moral issues in such subjects as religious education, English and geography. For example, senior pupils in a geography lesson discuss issues of birth control in relation to over-population, and the use of land in environmentally sensitive areas. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibilities through the sixth form and year-group councils. Positive achievements are celebrated in different ways, such as the displays in classrooms and corridors. Support for a range of charitable organisations, including Christie's hospital and Children in Need, helps the pupils to develop a caring attitude for those who are less fortunate than themselves.
49. Good provision is made for the pupils' social development. They mix and work together very effectively. In lessons, they work well as a class, in small groups and individually. The good quality of relationships within the school is a major factor in the pupils' social development. There is an appropriate programme of personal, social and health education. There are many other opportunities in such subjects as English, science, geography, music and art, for paired and group work when pupils share resources, manage their own learning and grow in maturity. Residential field trips in geography help senior pupils to socialise and work in teams. Younger pupils develop socially when they are on an adventure weekend in Shropshire or visiting the Castleshaw reservoir. The extensive range of extra-curricular activities makes a positive contribution to social development.
50. Provision for the pupils' cultural development is good. Visits are arranged to theatres and galleries and to such places as the Jewish museum and Hindu temple. There are regular trips to Germany and Normandy, and the school has an established link with a secondary high school in Arizona. Pupils exercise their musical talents in choirs, ensembles and bands and regularly give performances. The drama club puts on productions, such as 'Our Day Out'. As well as appreciating their own culture and traditions, the pupils effectively explore other cultures, with visits from Hindu dancers and Asian storytellers, and through writing their own haiku poems. Through religious education they develop a broad appreciation of Christian, Sikh, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu festivals. High-quality wall displays in corridors and teaching areas effectively celebrate a broad range of cultural activities. The accessing of information relating to other countries and people on the Internet, effectively broadens the pupils' cultural understanding.
51. On balance, the curriculum provides a good range of opportunities for attainment and enables pupils to achieve well.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

52. The school makes good provision for the care of its pupils. There are established procedures to identify and handle issues related to child protection; staff are informed of their responsibilities in the staff handbook and the correct procedures have been adopted when necessary. Satisfactory procedures are in place to protect the health and safety of pupils and staff. Assessments of the risks associated with work in each department have been made. Clear guidelines are established to deal with first aid and minor emergencies. Routine checks are conducted by the local education authority at appropriate intervals to ensure the safe operation of electrical, fire-prevention and other equipment. Pastoral care is good. A dedicated Year 7 team of tutors enable a smooth transfer from primary school. Heads of year and their assistants follow pupils through from Year 8, although many pupils have one or more changes of tutor between Year 8 and Year 11.
53. Overall, the school's monitoring of academic performance and personal development, and the educational and personal support and guidance available to pupils are satisfactory. Many teachers know pupils well and are able to offer good personal support and guidance.
54. Procedures for monitoring attendance are good. Registration is electronic, and registers are taken at the start of morning and afternoon sessions and at the beginning of each lesson. Reasons for absence are always sought and contact is made with parents on the first day of absence for pupils at risk of disaffection or exclusion.
55. Procedures for monitoring and promoting good behaviour are satisfactory. A structured behaviour policy is used well by established members of staff, but during the inspection a small minority of lessons was disrupted by misbehaviour which the teacher was not certain how to deal with. This was a particular problem with newly qualified and supply staff. Staff generally use the systems of rewards and sanctions appropriately, which pupils appreciate. Outside agencies are involved as necessary. Alternative learning packages to overcome disaffection in some pupils have been introduced, and a number of pupils in Year 11 are engaged on a 'New Start' programme in collaboration with the local education authority's 'Compact' service. Procedures to monitor and eliminate oppressive behaviour are good. The very few incidents of racism, bullying and other inappropriate behaviour are sympathetically dealt with and carefully recorded, along with the action taken.
56. Procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress are satisfactory. The use of assessment data to guide curricular planning is not consistent across all subject departments. Data is used well to set targets for school performance, but this does not permeate to the consistent setting of individual targets. In some subjects, such as ICT, assessment is good, but in science, mathematics and English in Years 7 to 9, assessment is unsatisfactory. At this stage, little use is made of National Curriculum levels. In the sixth form, assessment is consistently good and communicated well to parents. A whole-school marking policy is in place, but is not used consistently by all teachers in setting targets for future learning.
57. The care and support of pupils with special educational needs are generally satisfactory. Targets that are included in individual education plans are appropriate and measurable. However, these are not available consistently over the whole range of subjects. There are very effective procedures for identifying pupils who may have special needs, and their subsequent assessments are thorough. Where necessary, outside help is used appropriately for more searching tests or advice. There is very good liaison between the special needs co-ordinator and those in primary schools. Reviews of individual plans are held every term, but the files show that not all subjects

contribute to assessment of progress, nor show whether pupils have attained the targets set. Pupils with special educational needs have equal opportunities for inclusion in all school activities. Good records are kept by support assistants of the work they do and these are shared with colleagues, so that pupils receive good overall care from the department for individual studies. Pupils who have English as an additional language have a good command of English. This allows them to take a full part in the life of the school and to progress appropriately. Some receive extra help in the more technical parts of their work, and for this they have a regular input from a visiting teacher.

58. Procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' personal development are good. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 evaluate their own progress and maintain personal progress files. Pupils benefit from personal tutoring sessions. Form tutor times are variable in their usefulness. The best provide a purposeful and thoughtful start to the school day, but others are little more than social gatherings. Individual pupils' logbooks are used to record credits and half-termly effort grades, but this information is not consistently shared with parents.
59. Since the last inspection, effective support for pupils through personal monitoring has been maintained, but marking and the use of assessment to plan for future learning remain inconsistent.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

60. Parents view the school as a good one and the school is over-subscribed. They feel that the school has appropriate expectations for children to work hard and achieve their best. Most parents think that their children like school and make good progress. The strength of the music department is acknowledged. The majority said they would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem and consider that the teaching is good. Concerns were expressed by over a fifth of parents responding to the questionnaire: not all feel sufficiently well informed about how their children are getting on and several were of the opinion that homework is not set consistently and sometimes not marked quickly enough; some feel that the school does not work closely with them.
61. The inspectors agree with the positive views expressed by parents. They found the teaching to be good, that children make good progress, in line with the school's expectations of them, and that staff are willing to deal with questions or problems. Homework is not always set and marked consistently in Years 7 to 9, and pupils in Year 7 said that they had no timetable for homework. In Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, the use of homework is good. Teachers set regular homework and coursework for GCSE and A-level examinations. Inspectors found that the school does work closely with parents and keeps them informed on progress. The school communicates with parents about their child's progress with good, detailed progress reports in most subjects once a year. Interim reports and opportunities to meet teachers are provided. However, some parents do not regularly check their child's logbook, where some of the information on effort and attainment grades and credits are recorded.
62. Overall, the school has good and effective links with parents. Appropriate information is provided and parents feel able to approach the school if there are concerns or problems. Parents' involvement has a positive impact on the work of the school. The governing body has its full allocation of parent governors, although a ballot was not necessary to select the candidates when the last election should have been called. Parents attend productions and meetings arranged for them.
63. The quality of information provided to parents is good. The prospectus and the governors' annual report are both well produced and informative, although not all details

required by law are included. Parents receive lively, half-termly, newsletters providing information about events in school. Annual progress reports are good for most subjects, but some teachers comment only on attitudes and offer little insight into gains of knowledge and understanding in the subject, or what steps need to be taken to improve learning. This is particularly true in geography. For English, reports are very good. Consultation evenings are offered and parents who do not attend are contacted. Additional meetings are held for parents of certain groups of pupils, such as when options for GCSE courses are made. Parents are contacted for a variety of reasons, including letters and postcards of praise as well as when there is a problem. Home-school agreements have been established and parents are provided with their own copy of the school rules before they sign. An informative and easy to use web-site is maintained, covering many areas of school life.

64. Parents' involvement in the work of the school is good. They attend performances in which their children are involved and box-office sales for these contribute to the provision of resources in the school. Parents respond well to requests from the school to discuss their children. Very few parents attend meetings of the Friends Association, which acts as a forum for parents to express their views about school events, but there is no formal parent-teacher fund-raising organisation. Parents make a very good contribution to their own children's learning at home. A significant number of pupils are helped by their parents' provision of resources, including equipment such as personal computers, public examination texts and revision guides, and parental involvement in sporting and leisure activities outside school. However, logbooks are not consistently used as an effective communications medium between parents and teachers throughout the school.
65. Since the last inspection an effective partnership with parents has been maintained.
66. Parents of pupils with special educational needs are kept well informed about the support given at school, especially at the annual reviews of pupils who have statements of special needs. The views of parents are sought and recorded well in annual reviews, and parents are kept very well aware of the school's targets for pupils who have special needs. There is very good and close contact between the special needs co-ordinator and parents of pupils having special needs. In addition, the co-ordinator keeps track of these students in the next stage of their lives.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

67. This school is led and managed very well. The headteacher and key staff ensure that the school's sense of educational direction is strong, and they are supported in this by the rest of the staff and by governors. Aims for the school are clear, well displayed and well known. The focus on helping pupils of every background to develop their full social and academic potential, and ensuring respect, is commonly understood. Moreover, the school has succeeded well in turning its aims into reality. With very few exceptions, teachers and pupils demonstrate a strong day-to-day commitment to these values. Teachers reveal this commitment in their classroom teaching, their pastoral support and their involvement in extra-curricular activities, while pupils show it in their sociable behaviour, the very strong relationships typical of the school, and in their enthusiastic response to the opportunities offered to them.
68. Much management responsibility is delegated and the overall standard amongst those holding important posts of responsibility is good. Within the senior management team there has been a broadening of the structure to include former senior teachers as assistant headteachers, with specific, clearly defined, whole-school roles, operating alongside existing deputy heads. This is giving particularly strong support for several initiatives within the brief of these assistant heads, including improving teaching and

learning styles and standardising the use of assessment data for target setting. Such initiatives have had the added benefit of drawing upon the training skills and practical expertise of many other staff as part of consultation and in-service activities within these projects. Delegation to heads of department and heads of year is also successful, and sometimes particularly effective. For instance, in the physical education department, leadership and management are excellent, and are very good in history, art, ICT and religious education. There is good management in music, modern languages and design and technology. In geography and English, management arrangements are satisfactory, though improvement in English is taking place rapidly under a newly appointed and very capable head of department. In science and mathematics, however, leadership and management are unsatisfactory; while much is achieved by individuals taking initiatives, there is too little leadership and vision from departmental leaders, and there are inadequate procedures in place to ensure that aims become shared, consistent practice.

69. The co-ordinator for special educational needs brings very good leadership to this area of the school's work. Much hard work has been done to ensure the high quality of documents. In-service training for staff is very good, both in school and through external courses. The school meets the recommendations of the Code of Practice for special educational needs; these include a designated governor who is involved with this aspect. Funds allocated for those with special educational needs are used effectively and well. The liaison between the department and other subjects is inconsistent and is a weakness in the provision. There is no uniformity of practice between subjects and some do not provide targets or a review of pupils' progress.
70. At whole-school level as well as within departments, the monitoring and supporting of teaching is relatively recent. It has already reached a satisfactory standard and this has helped to ensure good arrangements for performance management. In many departments, staff are regularly observed teaching and find much encouragement from well-managed feedback from senior staff or departmental colleagues. This, and periodic discussions to review professional progress and aspirations, helps the majority of staff to feel valued and suitably encouraged towards further improvement. These features are particularly well developed within the history and business studies departments, and are established in most others to satisfactory levels, but are poorly developed within the mathematics and science departments.
71. Planning in the school is a great strength. The ability to choose appropriate priorities for development is very good and the process by which this is done has considerable merit since it involves extensive consultation with staff and governors. The priorities, once established, are supported from the budget by high-quality financial planning and day-to-day administration. At every turn, decisions are tested against the criteria involved in seeking best value. Planning is successful: the school puts realistic strategies in place to turn aims into practice and monitors progress well. Crucially, there is also a strong, shared commitment to improve and a capacity to succeed on the part of virtually all staff.
72. The school's governing body fulfils its responsibilities well. There is a core of well-informed governors who have acquired a detailed knowledge of the school's strengths and weaknesses and share this with colleagues via numerous sub-committee meetings. While the annual report to parents has a range of technical deficiencies, wider statutory obligations are satisfactorily met. Above all, the governors support senior managers and the school's name in the community well. They offer detailed and questioning comment on early drafts of plans and help to reshape later versions. They take on substantial responsibility alongside the headteacher in pursuing financial and accommodation issues with contractors and the local authority.

73. As a result of these largely positive features, the school has been able to make good improvements since the last inspection. This is despite the absence of a permanent headteacher for 15 months prior to the present head's relatively recent appointment, and the long-term absence of an assistant head. The inspection report of May 1996 asked the school to meet statutory requirements in the curriculum for religious education and design and technology. These are now met, but the Act of Worship requirements are not. GCSE standards and areas of concern at A-level have been addressed with some success: above-average standards, in line with demanding targets, have been maintained at GCSE, while the points score for pupils aged 14 to 18 at A-level has risen over the last five years. Formerly, assessment was poorly organised, but is now well organised and the policy is effectively implemented by most so that practice has improved, and many gains have already become evident. About 90 per cent of lessons had satisfactory teaching in 1996 compared with 97 per cent in 2001. The school was also asked to develop a wider role for heads of department and this has been done to the point where clear leadership and management responsibilities are carried out well by the great majority of departments, with only two notable exceptions. Lastly, the report criticised the match of work to pupils' needs in much of the teaching observed. For high-attaining and low-attaining pupils, this problem has been substantially reduced; for those pupils of broadly average ability, good provision is made in several departments and satisfactory arrangements exist in most others, while a minority do not yet offer sufficient variation in the work set.
74. Teachers and managers have brought the school forward with considerable success, and in their current plans they have identified many of the remaining areas for improvement noted in this report.

Staffing

75. The school benefits from having a well qualified, committed staff. Most staff teach the full age range, and in mathematics, all staff have the opportunity to take sixth form courses. Staff turnover is high, but many have left for promotion. There have been problems in recruiting in some subject areas, but throughout the school, the effect of non-specialists taking groups has not been detrimental to pupils' learning. However, in Year 7 English lessons, while non-specialist teachers follow the schemes of work, their limited breadth of knowledge often means that their lessons lack depth.
76. A major problem is the need for staff to travel between two sites. The headteacher has increased the staffing ratio to try to compensate for this, but several staff are travelling more than others, especially if they teach the full age range of pupils. In several subject areas, groups are shared by different staff. This happens frequently in English, mathematics and design and technology and, deliberately, in science. This adversely affects the continuity and planning of lessons and is a hindrance to raising standards. Teaching design and technology in non-specialist rooms puts pressure on resources, on the range of experiences pupils receive, and on the teachers.
77. A good structure is in place to support, help and monitor newly qualified teachers and although the senior manager with this responsibility is currently absent, the systems for monitoring still proceed effectively. Occasionally, these teachers are not given sufficient support in dealing with pupils' behavioural problems. Teachers new to the school are well supported by their heads of departments, colleagues and the headteacher. Since the arrival of the present headteacher, the structure of staffing has been altered, and middle managers have been given more responsibility and authority. For example, the head of history has been seconded for four terms to develop and implement teaching and learning strategies. The clerical support staff have also had their responsibilities reviewed and technical support is currently under review. The school bursar is very effective in the management of finances and resources and is a

member of the senior management team. Performance management systems are in place and clear targets have been identified. Training needs are closely linked to the school development plan, and individual and departmental needs are considered carefully. Some departments have appointed ICT representatives to liaise on cross-curricular provision. The government's New Opportunities Funding for ICT is particularly effective in science and design and technology, though some areas of the curriculum have yet to benefit.

Accommodation

78. The school occupies the sites of two former separate schools. The main building, dating from the 1950s, is more than a mile from the lower school, built as a secondary school in the 1920s. The lower school is used to accommodate Years 7 and 8 and is seen as providing an easy transition from primary to secondary education. This advantage, however, is offset by the loss of time involved in moving to the main school in order to use specialist facilities in certain subjects, such as physical education, design and technology and art. This arrangement also creates problems in the organisation of staffing and timetables, and wastes pupils' time as they travel between sites when they could be involved in extra-curricular activities. There is also a general lack of storage space and designated specialist rooms in the lower school, although in the upper school there are good offices for the staff and ample storage space.
79. In some subject areas, the accommodation provided is unsatisfactory for the coverage of the curriculum. Science, in particular, experiences difficulties with classrooms which are too small for practical work, and in some cases completely out of date. Additionally, almost every room available has to function as a corridor, and much of the furnishing is in poor condition. Provision for preparation in science is, however, good with sufficient space and storage facilities. Weaknesses in the provision of accommodation for English include small rooms, which hinder movement and group work, and lack of security for new computers, which keeps them out of commission. The teaching of languages is also affected by problems stemming from split-site teaching. There has been progress, however, in the development of display and in brightening up the language-learning environment. In design and technology, 30 lessons each week are taught outside the specialist area due to lack of space within the department, and there is only one food technology room, which is accessed via a laundry room. It is necessary to go through the design and technology area to reach some art studios, and the open-plan layout contributes to the problem of noise. Studio space is cramped when occupied by large class groups and the sixth form area is too small for large-scale work.
80. Accommodation for other subjects is satisfactory, and in the case of physical education and music, it is good. The sports hall and the outdoor pavilion are very good facilities and there is good provision of playing fields. Music and the library resources centre occupy newly built accommodation of a good standard. The sixth form block is a positive feature and provides a well-used social and study amenity.
81. The floors in corridors and on staircases are in poor condition: old lino tiles are breaking up in many areas and concrete surfaces are crumbling and dusty. Provision for dining is satisfactory in the main school but in the lower school it is poor, the building used for this purpose being of poor quality and poorly heated.
82. Many of the problems in accommodation are the result of greatly increased numbers. The main school, built for five hundred pupils, now houses double that number, and whilst some new building has taken place, the circulation areas, corridors and staircases remain cramped.

Resources

83. The provision of learning resources is satisfactory. Expenditure on learning resources, at 7.3 per cent of the budget, is high compared with national averages. The school has budgeted to spend £200 per pupil this financial year, which places it in the high-spending group of schools. This is an increase over the previous year, partly because of the need to duplicate some resources because of the split site. The school has planned, wisely, to spend on learning resources to support teaching. Most areas have sufficient books and equipment. There are very good levels of resources in music, and good ones in ICT, history, geography, physical education and art. The science department is well equipped with sufficient textbooks for class and home use. The English department has a shortage of books, and many pupils buy their own for use in Year 9 and for GCSE and A-level work.
84. Compared with national averages, there are sufficient computers for pupils. In addition to those in the ICT department there are computers in all departments. However, access to the ICT rooms is difficult because of the high demand and this restricts teaching methods in some areas. Access to new technology, such as interactive whiteboards, is very limited. There are good computing facilities in the sixth form centre.
85. The libraries on both sites are good. The upper school library, in particular, provides a good selection of printed, visual and electronic material, in pleasant surroundings. As a matter of policy, departments are requested to put reference copies of their main textbooks in the library. The library is part of the local library loan system and receives regular new supplies of books. This resource is sufficiently well staffed to ensure that it is readily available throughout the day and after school.
86. The school makes good use of its resources through careful planning linked to the development plan. There are good systems for budgeting and for applying best value principles. The bursar, who is a member of the senior management team, is well organised and effective, and ensures a good supply of information to the head and to governors to help them with financial decisions. The auditor's report confirms that financial procedures are good. The governors and senior management take every opportunity to attract funds from a variety of sources.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

87. In order to raise standards further the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- (1) improve accommodation by ensuring that:
 - sufficient design and technology rooms are available and that all science laboratories are of an adequate standard; (paragraphs 79,130,140)
 - the many efficiency problems caused by the school's split site are reduced to an absolute minimum, particularly travel time lost by staff and pupils, shared responsibilities for teaching groups, and timetabling constraints caused by lack of facilities on either site (paragraphs 76,78,131,140).
- (2) establish sound management in the science and mathematics departments, so that:
 - effective monitoring and support of teaching is given, in order to improve the quality in Years 7 to 11; (paragraphs 28,32,68,107,108,113,116)
 - consistently good use is made of assessment data to set demanding targets for pupils; (paragraphs 27,56,68,105,108,116)
 - all classes have work which is more closely matched to the range of pupils' needs (paragraphs 7,107,116).
- (3) improve the provision for the development and application of numeracy skills across the curriculum, so that all subjects include strategies that build numerical skills into day-to-day teaching and thereby help to raise standards of attainment (paragraphs 43,109).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	209
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	65

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
4	21	46	26	3	0.5	0

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

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1341	206
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	102	0

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	8	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	114	2

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	36

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	21
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	48

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.5
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.5
National comparative data	1.1

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	130	135	265

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	99	96	86
	Girls	120	90	82
	Total	219	186	168
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	83 (78)	70 (72)	63 (68)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	44 (30)	43(49)	30(31)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	87	102	100
	Girls	121	112	107
	Total	208	214	207
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	78 (85)	81 (76)	78 (87)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	33 (44)	51 (51)	31 (46)
	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	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	135	124	259

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	70	131	135
	Girls	81	120	123
	Total	151	251	258
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	59 (53)	97 (95)	100 (97)
	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	41
	National	38.7 (38)

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

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	40	52	92

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	19.5	17.0	18.1 (16.5)	na	2.0	na
National	17.7	18.6	18.2 (17.9)	2.6	2.8	2.8

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	na	na
	National		82.5

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	7
Indian	7
Pakistani	17
Bangladeshi	10
Chinese	2
White	1493
Any other minority ethnic group	10

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	35	3
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	94.1
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	17
Total aggregate hours worked per week	460

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	71.5
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24.5
Key Stage 4	22.6

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	3,818,135
Total expenditure	3,821,986
Expenditure per pupil	2,502
Balance brought forward from previous year	9,329
Balance carried forward to next year	5,478

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out

1547

Number of questionnaires returned

303

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	28	62	8	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	35	55	8	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	26	61	5	2	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	20	57	18	3	2
The teaching is good.	24	68	6	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	17	60	18	4	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	43	50	6	1	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	55	40	4	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	22	53	17	4	4
The school is well led and managed.	30	55	4	4	7
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	32	56	6	2	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	20	50	13	4	13

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

ENGLISH

88. By the age of 14, standards are above average. In the National Curriculum tests in 2000, results were well above average compared to national averages, and well above average when compared to schools with a similar intake. Results were much better than those in mathematics and science. Girls performed better than boys, but both performed well above the national average. Results have risen over the last five years, and were especially high in 1998 and 2000. Standards seen during inspection week were not as high as these results would suggest, but confirm the teacher assessments of above average rather than well above average standards.
89. Many pupils attain high standards and only a small minority does not reach Level 5, the national expectation, by the age of 14. Higher attainers read Shakespeare with understanding and enjoyment. They understand the humour in 'Twelfth Night', and use quotation well to support their ideas. Middle attainers respond enthusiastically to plot and character and even lower attainers understand the story at a basic level. Higher attainers produce accurate written work in a range of genres and for a variety of purposes. They use vivid description in imaginative pieces and handle complex sentences effectively. Middle attainers use an extensive vocabulary for specific effect. Punctuation is accurate, but paragraphs are not always used. Lower attainers use capitals and full stops correctly, but spelling is flawed and verbs often do not agree with their subjects. Pupils ask and answer questions relevantly, though lower attainers are reticent in class. Many pupils are articulate and clear. They join in class discussion with vigour, and contribute sensibly to group work. Pupils are well prepared for their National Curriculum tests. Pupils' achievements in Years 7 to 9 are satisfactory. They maintain the above average standards that they show on entry to the school. Pupils with special educational needs also make satisfactory progress. They often struggle to keep up in lessons, because only rarely is appropriate work set that they can access at their own level. However, they receive good help from their peers and some individual attention from teachers who know their strengths and weaknesses well. Large class sizes and small rooms limit the amount of time that teachers can spend helping individual pupils.
90. By the age of 16, standards are above average. In the GCSE examinations in 2000, results were average compared to schools nationally and average compared to similar schools. Pupils did less well in English than in the other core subjects; results have remained at broadly the same level over recent years. In English, results at grades A* to C were above average, but they were well below average in the A* and A categories. In English literature, results were above average, but only 18 per cent of pupils took the examination, which is well below the percentage entered by most schools. The school now gives all pupils the opportunity to enter for both language and literature at GCSE, a great improvement on the previous situation. There has also been much improvement in the level of challenge in the teaching of pupils aged 14 to 16. Consequently, standards seen during inspection week were above average, and a good proportion of pupils are now attaining A* and A grades. Girls' results were much better than boys' in the 2000 examinations, by far more than is seen nationally, but the gap is beginning to narrow.
91. High-attaining pupils, of whom there are many, are able to work independently, and have the confidence to develop their own ideas. This is a good improvement since the previous inspection. Some are very articulate, with a sophisticated vocabulary, and use technical terms such as 'semantic field' fluently. They analyse literature perceptively and understand how writers create effect. Essays on Macbeth' show a thorough

knowledge of historical and sociological background. Middle attainers write with reasonable accuracy, though there are still some basic spelling errors and they need help to develop and structure their work. They refer to text well to support their ideas and can analyse techniques, such as how suspense is created. They co-operate well in groups and some are able to direct discussion effectively. Lower attainers respond well orally, but written work is technically weak. They appreciate character and understand early nineteenth century literature, but they struggle to extend their ideas. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 now achieve well. Teachers challenge pupils at an appropriate level for their ability. Year 11 pupils in a fast-track set achieved very well in a challenging poetry lesson where groups were examining poems by different poets. They deepened their understanding of how the poets worked and were beginning to see for themselves, by the end of the hour, the similarities in their themes. In a Year 10 drama group, pupils made great strides in developing their self-control and self-confidence, and in learning how to criticise their own and others' performances so that they could improve. Pupils with special educational needs also achieve well, with work set at a level appropriate to their ability.

92. At the end of post 16 education, standards are below average. In the A-level examinations in 2000, results were average in English literature, but below average in both language and combined language and literature. The department has made the sensible decision to limit the courses to two and has dropped the combined course. Inspection evidence confirms standards to be below average, but students achieve satisfactorily, taking into account their below-average entry profile. Few students are attaining the highest grades at the moment. Students write with interest and some close analysis on modern texts such as 'View From the Bridge', but are less confident with poetry or with texts where language poses problems. They do not read sufficiently widely to develop the confidence they need for analysis either of language or literature. For example, they did not recognise allusions to '1984' in a political speech. They lack wide background knowledge and need a lot of teacher support. Only a few have taken GCSE literature, a situation which has now been rectified for future A-level students.
93. Pupils use planning, drafting and refining techniques throughout the school, but there is insufficient use made of computers to aid this process. Opportunities to use computers are written into the schemes of work, but these are not taken up sufficiently frequently.
94. Pupils have good attitudes towards their studies. The vast majority work hard and are interested in learning. They show lively involvement in their lessons, especially in Years 10 and 11. Relationships between pupils, and between teachers and pupils, are good, resulting in productive lessons.
95. Standards of teaching are good, but there is a lot of variation, and standards range from excellent and very good to, occasionally, below satisfactory. Teaching is satisfactory for pupils in Years 7 to 9, very good for pupils in Years 10 and 11, and good in the sixth form. Learning by pupils follows the same pattern. A major strength of teaching is good management of the pupils, which allows them to concentrate and develop understanding at a fast rate. Providing the level of challenge appropriate to learning needs is a strength higher up the school, but in Years 7 to 9, only in the very good lessons does teaching take sufficient account of the range of prior attainment within the class. Too often, work is pitched to the middle so that higher attainers are not challenged, and lower attainers struggle to understand. This was an area deemed to be in need of improvement in the previous report. Subject knowledge is a strength, with teachers inspiring pupils through their enthusiasm and breadth of knowledge, so that pupils make great efforts and learn quickly. Where subject knowledge is less secure, especially in Year 7 form studies, lessons are less stimulating. In Years 10 and 11, assessment is used effectively to promote learning and pupils have good knowledge of their own strengths and weaknesses. In Years 7 to 9, however, it is far less effective,

though a start has been made to improving the systems. Marking is thorough and diagnostic in the best teaching, but brief and unhelpful in the worst. The teaching of basic skills is satisfactory, but though spellings are corrected, this is not followed up sufficiently and pupils lack strategies to improve.

96. Pupils' experiences are greatly enhanced by the opportunities for studying drama and media studies. Discrete drama is developing well across the school and media studies is taught very well as an option at GCSE and A-level, where standards are above average. Both these areas make good contributions to pupils' social and moral development.
97. Management of the department is satisfactory. Many effective developments have been implemented in the last year and there is a clear vision, carefully planned, of where the department needs to improve and how it is going to do so. A good start has been made in the monitoring of teaching and curricular planning, resulting in a more cohesive department. Satisfactory improvements have been made since the previous inspection.

Literacy

98. Standards of literacy are above average. Pupils read with understanding and express their ideas clearly. They write accurately, apart from some weaknesses in spelling, and can extend their ideas in a structured manner. The school has appointed a literacy co-ordinator and a successful summer school took place this year. There is a literacy policy, but strategies to develop pupils' literacy skills further are not yet sufficiently in place across the curriculum. Practice is not monitored closely enough. For instance, very few classrooms display key words and very few classes have dictionaries available. Some good work is going on in physical education, where relevant vocabulary is displayed and referred to constantly by teachers. Pupils are encouraged to develop ideas through discussion. Also, in religious education, pupils are given many opportunities for discussion and different kinds of writing. Key words are introduced carefully and discussed. Pupils are encouraged to read their own books in registration time, but the effectiveness of this is patchy. Many departments have not given enough careful consideration to how they can contribute to the development of pupils' literacy skills.

MATHEMATICS

99. In the 2000 national tests for 14 year olds, results were above the national average when compared with all schools. This represents a fall from previous years' results, mainly as a result of a decline in the performance of girls. When compared with similar schools, attainment was well below average. Results in mathematics were similar to those in science, but not as good as those in English. Results have improved over the last three years, though not as fast as results nationally.
100. GCSE examination results in 2000 were above the national average when compared with all schools and average when compared to similar schools. These results represent an improvement on 1999 results, and are as high as they should be, taking into account pupils' prior attainment. Pupils performed as well in mathematics as they did in most other subjects they studied. The proportion gaining A* to G grades was above results nationally, with few pupils failing to gain at least grade G.
101. In the 2000 A-level examinations, results were below the national average in the higher grades A and B, but in line with national averages for grades A to E. In previous years, results have usually been close to national averages.

102. In the work seen, standards are above those expected at the age of 14. Number skills are satisfactory. Most pupils can handle decimal numbers confidently. Algebraic skills are weaker, although higher-attaining pupils can solve simultaneous equations. Pupils have a satisfactory understanding of shape and space; in Year 8, pupils calculate the areas of triangles and parallelograms. Data handling is satisfactory; pupils can record and display information well using tables and a variety of charts. Little evidence was seen during the inspection to make a clear judgement about problem-solving skills.
103. At the age of 16, standards in the work seen are above those expected. Number skills are good. Pupils write decimal numbers to an appropriate degree of accuracy, and they use calculators confidently and accurately. Algebraic skills are generally satisfactory. Average-attaining pupils can expand brackets and simplify algebraic expressions. Data-handling skills are good. These are reflected in geography, where pupils handle information well. Pupils have a good understanding of shape and space. Year 10 average-attaining pupils use Pythagoras' theorem confidently. Problem-solving skills are satisfactory. Pupils can identify patterns and rules, use formulae, predict and test results. Standards for the highest-attaining pupils are good in all aspects of mathematics.
104. Standards in the sixth form are broadly average. In Year 12, students develop well their understanding of simplifying algebraic fractions and use vector notation confidently. In Year 13, students have a good understanding of statistical methods to analyse information.
105. Achievement is satisfactory. Above-average attainment levels on entry are maintained at the ages of 14 and 16. Higher and lower-attaining pupils achieve well. However, average-attaining pupils achieve only satisfactorily. Poor attitudes to learning by a small number of pupils, a lack of challenge and variety in the activities provided, and the slow pace of lessons result in progress for these pupils not being as good as that of others. Pupils with special educational need make good progress, because they are given appropriate tasks. The majority of pupils acquire skills, knowledge and understanding well. They work productively during lessons and usually show interest in what they are doing. Progress is good in the sixth form.
106. Attitudes are generally good and in the sixth form they are very good. Most pupils concentrate on their tasks, though some average-attaining pupils have to be monitored carefully by teachers. Listening skills are satisfactory; pupils usually listen attentively when teachers are talking, though there are instances when teachers have to remind pupils regularly to pay attention during discussion sessions. Many show interest in what they are doing and they work well on their tasks. Pupils generally behave well in class. The presentation of work in books is good by most pupils. Relationships between teachers and pupils are generally good, and the latter usually respond appropriately to the teachers' questions.
107. On balance, the quality of teaching is satisfactory. This is true for Years 7 to 11, while teaching in the sixth form is good. Generally the quality is best with the higher and lower attainers. All teachers have good subject knowledge and are able to explain concepts clearly, so that pupils increase their understanding. Lesson planning is generally satisfactory, with appropriate activities provided for most pupils, although suitable challenge is not always provided for higher and average attainers to help them to extend their learning. The available time is often used well, although not enough use is made of the end of lessons to review what pupils have learned. Questioning of pupils is generally good and usually explores well what pupils know and understand of the topic being covered. Good use was made of computers to support learning with a Year 7 class using spreadsheets to produce graphs of a survey done in lessons. Homework is used to build upon learning in lessons although not enough challenge is provided in

some homework tasks. Where teaching is weakest, the pace of lessons is slow and teachers do not manage pupils well enough to ensure that they concentrate on their work. The overall quality of marking is satisfactory, although few comments are provided about what pupils should do to improve their standards. Overall, pupils' learning is satisfactory across Years 7 to 11 and good in the sixth form. There is not enough variety in teaching styles in Years 7 to 11 to help pupils learn as well as they do elsewhere in the school: mental and practical activities and the use of problem-solving tasks are not regular features of most teaching.

108. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. A clear direction for the work of the department is not provided, improvement since the last inspection is unsatisfactory and the recommendations of a recent report from the local education authority have not been fully acted upon. Although very good arrangements are in place for assessing pupils' attainment, the results of these, and other school assessment information, is not being used well enough to monitor pupil's progress. Recent appointments of teachers responsible for different aspects of the subject have resulted in a clear focus being given to identified priorities for the subject. There is a clear commitment by these and other teachers to raising standards, but not enough direction is being provided for them. The role of these teachers is not clearly set out in job descriptions. Although there are arrangements for the monitoring of teaching, it does not take place often enough. There are ten classes that are shared by teachers and although staff do their best to minimise the effect of this, the achievement of pupils in these classes is adversely influenced. Timetabling arrangements related to the split site result in limited opportunities for teachers to meet and operate effectively as a team. A numeracy policy has not yet been developed sufficiently to include other subjects.

Numeracy

109. Standards of numeracy are satisfactory. Although most subjects do not plan well enough for developing basic numeracy skills, the levels of numeracy shown by pupils are not having an adverse effect on their work. In science, pupils' skills are sufficient for the demands of the subject, even though there is no co-ordinated approach to measurement or graphical work. In design and technology, pupils measure accurately in design work, and in geography, they show good data-handling skills.

SCIENCE

110. Over recent years, the results in the national tests taken at the age of 14 have been above the national averages. In 2000, however, results matched the national figures, and were well below the results in similar schools. Results in science are close to those in mathematics, but below those in English. When compared to the attainment in science of these pupils when they entered the school, this represents satisfactory achievement. Standards evident in lessons and in pupils' books were not significantly different from those achieved in 2000. In some lessons, pupils show good standards of practical and investigative work and display knowledge and understanding of difficult scientific concepts. For example, pupils in a Year 8 lesson were able to explain dissolving in terms of the particulate nature of matter. Standards in some lessons are poor. For instance, pupils in a Year 9 class, including pupils of all attainment, spent a whole lesson measuring each other's height and compiling a list, in order to learn that there is continuous variation in the heights of human beings.
111. At the age of 16, results in GCSE examinations are above the national average. This level of attainment has been maintained over the last two years, following a period when results were well above the national figures. Results in 2000 matched the performance in similar schools. The rise in standards from 14 to 16 represents satisfactory achievement. Observation of lessons and analysis of pupils' work indicate

that this standard is being maintained. Pupils in a high-attaining set studying chemistry in Year 11 worked at a fast pace, concentrated well and were able to use their understanding of the periodic table of elements to predict the chemical properties of groups of elements. Pupils in a lower-attaining set in Year 10, working in very harmonious, mixed-gender groups, researched the properties and uses of electro-magnetic waves. Every group produced work of an appropriately high standard.

112. Results in A-level examinations are above the national average. Over the last three years, there have been no failures and the proportion gaining the higher grades A or B has been nearly 40 per cent. A-level students are mature and independent learners. The presentations given to the class by Year 13 physics students, based on their own research of difficult topics, displayed very good knowledge and understanding of subjects such as the use of X-rays in medicine and scintillation cameras. Year 12 students demonstrated a complete mastery of the way in which DNA functions in living cells. The performance at A-level, when compared to the same students' attainment at GCSE, is never less than expected, and often better, which is good achievement.
113. Teaching overall is unsatisfactory because of shortcomings observed in Years 7 to 9. In Years 10 and 11 the quality is broadly satisfactory, while sixth form teaching is good. Teaching across Years 7 to 9 is too variable. Some very good and excellent teaching was observed: it was characterised by detailed planning, based on clear learning objectives, and a coherent series of activities. These lessons resulted in effective learning, which was constantly checked both by questions involving all pupils and short tests built into the lessons. For example, pupils in a higher set in Year 11 competently measured the cooling curve of stearic acid as it changed from a liquid to a solid. Every minute of the lesson was filled with purposeful activity and all pupils could discuss their work with good understanding. Because of the skill with which the experiment had been introduced, some were able to predict the levelling-out on the graph that occurs as the bonding between the molecules changes. In these well-planned and interesting lessons, pupils respond positively, work hard and behave very well. Pupils learning the basics of genetics in Year 9 contributed many ideas and questions which were very well used by the teacher, who was able to control their enthusiasm without spoiling their obvious enjoyment of the lesson. However, one in six of the lessons observed was unsatisfactory or poor. These lessons were badly planned: learning objectives were unclear and the activities included did not provide good learning opportunities and resulted in confusion. Pupils in a mixed-ability class in Year 7, following a lesson intended to extend their earlier learning about filtration and evaporation, spent an entire lesson observing five tubes containing different liquids, did no experimental work and knew little more at the end than they had at the beginning. Lessons lacking clarity of purpose, or where the work does not match pupils' attainment, sometimes result in poor behaviour that the teacher then fails to control.
114. Standards of numeracy and literacy in the school are sufficiently high to meet the demands of the science curriculum at levels appropriate to pupils' attainment. However, within science teaching, there is no co-ordinated approach towards raising these standards, or evidence of a whole-school policy, designed to address this aspect of pupils' work. Science teachers show sensitivity to the problems experienced by pupils with special educational needs and give them as much extra attention as possible. The use of ICT to enrich the science curriculum is very good.
115. Pupils of all ages have very positive attitudes towards the learning of science. They clearly value the subject and appreciate the potential value of good qualifications. Generally, they behave very well and work hard. Even when lessons are not inherently interesting, they continue to concentrate, complete the work set and learn satisfactorily. Only where teaching is poor do they behave badly. This generally positive approach allows them to learn more successfully than teaching quality might imply: while learning

is unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9, it is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11 and good in the sixth form.

116. Leadership and management of the department are unsatisfactory. While many individuals operate effectively, teachers are not working together as a mutually supportive team, subscribing consistently to the same departmental practice; nor is there the climate of open discussion found in most other departments in the school. This largely reflects the lack of effective arrangements for monitoring and supporting colleagues by the head of department. As a result, many aspects of the department have shortcomings: there is a continuing failure to deal successfully with the incidence of serious weaknesses in teaching and there is lack of clarity in the lines of responsibility, which is limiting the revision of the schemes of work for Years 7 to 9. In addition, only some teachers follow the departmental marking policy, and not all use assessment data effectively to set targets for all pupils and monitor their progress carefully. Management decisions affecting aspects of the curriculum and timetable arrangements across Years 7 to 11 have also limited teachers' ability to meet the needs of all pupils effectively. For instance, because of the policy of having lessons from Year 9 onwards taught by subject specialists, there can be long intervals between lessons on the same topic. This results in pupils' struggling to retain knowledge and teachers having to repeat work, with a consequential loss of pace. This problem was very evident in a well-planned and well-taught lesson on cell division, given to a Year 11 class whose previous lesson on this topic had been ten days earlier. Not all teachers are providing suitably challenging work for all pupils in the large classes in Years 7 to 9, which include pupils with a wide range of attainment. Some of the classes in Years 10 and 11 include pupils who may be entered for different levels of the GCSE examination, so that some have to study topics on which they will not be examined.
117. There has been insufficient response to the criticisms made of the department in the recent report by the local education authority, in which many of these shortcomings were also identified.
118. The accommodation is inadequate both in quantity and quality. Some lessons are taken in ordinary classrooms and some of the laboratories are seriously overcrowded. Both these factors limit opportunities to do experimental work. All the laboratories in the upper school are unsuitably equipped for modern science teaching and are in need of refurbishment. The poor state of décor and cleanliness produces a dismal environment which does little for the morale of pupils or teachers.
119. Well-qualified and hard working technicians ably support the work of the department.
120. Since the last inspection, the standards achieved at A-level have improved significantly. None of the other criticisms made then, which included weaknesses in teaching, assessment and ensuring that policies are consistently translated into practice, have been successfully addressed.
121. The weaknesses in teaching and management need to be addressed as a matter of urgency if standards are to improve.

ART AND DESIGN

122. At age 14, pupils' attainment is above average. There are good levels of skill evident in drawing based on observation and imagination, and in the application and use of colour in design. Pupils' drawings and studies are used as a basis for wide development, notably in high-quality printmaking, in which higher-attaining pupils attain standards that are well above average. Lower-attaining pupils show confidence and accuracy in their drawing and painting, and their work is well presented and carefully finished. Pupils with

special educational needs are able to produce lively designs with bold and imaginative use of colour and texture. Three-dimensional work in clay is a strong feature at this stage and is consistently above average in relation to levels of prior attainment. The best of this work is again well above average with well-constructed forms, richly decorated and colourfully glazed. The study of the art of other cultures is used very successfully as a basis for design in both two and three dimensions. Very good relief work in ceramics, for example, is derived from the study of Buddhist shrines. Art history material is interwoven with pupils' own creative work, and an enhanced understanding of the work of major artists is evident as a consequence. The balance between written work and practical work varies. Higher-attaining pupils write extensively in their art notebooks and display good skills in communication, whilst lower-attaining pupils are able to develop their ideas more fully in their practical work. Computers are used effectively in projects, and many pupils are able to use a range of ICT functions. This represents an improvement since the last inspection.

123. Achievement at the age of 14 is good. From an average level of attainment on entry, pupils make good progress in knowledge, skill and understanding. They work in a purposeful and careful way on projects which link processes in sequence. Drawing is a common starting point, leading to developments in printmaking, collage and three-dimensional design. A good example of this is the project focusing on portrait, starting with observed self-portrait and leading to high-quality printmaking from relief blocks produced as collage. Talented and pupils with special educational needs alike benefit from the nature of the subject, and an additional factor in learning is the sensitive individual tuition which is practised in the department.
124. At the age of 16, results in GCSE examinations are well above average. In the most recent year, 72 per cent of pupils gained grades A* to C, against a national average of 51.9 per cent, with boys gaining better results than girls and getting results better than those obtained in their other subjects. Well above average attainment is evident in coursework and displays. A particularly strong feature is the very high quality three-dimensional work in ceramics. The best examples surmount technical difficulties in firing and glazing large-scale work, and show a high standard of skill with clay. Printmaking and design, related to art history studies, reach a very good standard, and the art of other cultures continues to be used very successfully as a source of ideas. Pupils show confidence in the use of computers for the storage of work, for reference and for the manipulation of images in their designs.
125. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good. Pupils show a good level of creative self-confidence and are able to work independently in the development of their ideas. Pupils employ and extend skills and understanding gained earlier in drawing and design. The high level of presentation and care is sustained in the finished work produced at this stage. The pace of progress is good and is aided by enthusiasm for the subject and by good behaviour.
126. Results in A-level examinations are very good. Pupils gain an average points score of 5.7 against the school average of 3. Attainment in ongoing, individual projects bears out these results, with a high standard of drawing and painting and very high standards in three-dimensional work. Pupils develop their ideas on a large scale in painting and establish a personal direction with confidence and maturity. Achievement is very good at this stage. Three-dimensional work builds effectively upon the skills acquired earlier and pupils can realise their ideas in ceramics and other, experimental, media. Progress in painting is likewise aided by the basic art skills learned earlier.
127. At all stages, achievement is enhanced by a responsible attitude to the use of materials and equipment and by good behaviour. A good working atmosphere prevails in studios, despite the pressure of some large groups and problems with accommodation.

Behaviour is very good in the great majority of classes and there is a good level of cooperation between pupils and between pupils and teachers.

128. The quality of teaching in art is good for the school as a whole and very good in the sixth form. In a significant number of lessons seen, teaching was very good, and in the best it was excellent. No lessons observed were less than satisfactory. Lessons are prepared and presented very thoroughly. The level of expectation is very high in all cases and pace is good. A major strength is the very good quality of teacher-pupil relationships. This is the basis of the good working atmosphere observed in class and underpins the quality of learning. Pupils are able to combine busy enthusiasm with due respect for their teachers. A further important strength is the sensitive individual tuition in lessons. This provides for good learning at different levels of pupil achievement and, in particular, enables pupils with special educational needs to make good progress. Assessment is continuous during discussion of work in lessons, and pupils' sketch-notebooks are a valuable source of information on progress for teachers, pupils, and parents. Formal assessment arrangements follow whole-school patterns, with assessment at the end of projects, pupil review sheets and summative assessments conveyed to parents at least once a year. Schemes of work are regularly reviewed in the light of implications from assessment. On balance, learning is good across Years 7 to 11 and very good in the sixth form
129. The curriculum is broad and varied in Years 7 to 9 and covers work in two and three dimensions and in critical studies. National Curriculum requirements are fully met. In Years 10 and 11, a general art syllabus is followed and the assessment objectives of the GCSE course are used alongside the school pattern of assessment. A similar situation obtains in Years 12 and 13, when the assessment of the A and AS art syllabus supplements the school assessment system.
130. The department is very well managed. Documentation is well thought out and very accessible. Schemes of work are linked carefully to the programmes of study of the National Curriculum and to the GCSE and A-level syllabuses. Relationships in the department are very good, with a shared commitment. The standard of display is very high, both within the department and around the school. Success at different levels is acknowledged in display as an important form of encouragement.
131. The work of the department is affected by difficulties in accommodation. Access to the area is limited by the need to pass through adjoining suites of rooms. There are awkward changes of level and noise transmission between open-planned rooms. A related difficulty stems from the large number of pupils in some classes. The split-site arrangement of the school gives rise to problems in timetabling, and teaching difficulties result from split groups.
132. Despite these difficulties, the department has shown improvement in gaining higher grades in examinations and in improving teaching from good to very good since the last inspection. The department makes an important contribution to the creative development of pupils and to the life of the school.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

133. By the age of 14, standards are above the national average. In the teachers' assessments in 2000, the number of pupils reaching Level 5 and Level 6 was very high compared with the national average. However, from the scrutiny of work and lesson observations, standards are above the national average rather than well above. Few pupils show attainment at the higher levels. Girls perform better than boys and pupils with special educational needs attain in line with their ability, especially in practical work.

134. On entry, pupils' skills in design and technology match those normally seen, though some pupils have had fewer experiences than others in their previous schools. Achievement over the three years is good, and most pupils have a variety of design-and-make experiences in a wide range of material areas. Pupils have the opportunity to develop and analyse their ideas, particularly in their work in food, where they design their own pizza and food container, and in metal and wood, where they have to consider the practicalities of their design of, for example, book supports or coat hooks, to a particular need. By the age of 14, most pupils are developing good knowledge and understanding of the properties of materials and, in many cases, good, competent graphic skills.
135. By the age of 16, standards are good in the different material areas. In the GCSE examinations in 2000, results were above the national average and in line with the school's results at grades A* to C; 58 per cent gained these grades. Results were well above the national average in resistant materials and electronics. Food technology results have improved from 1999 by approximately 20 per cent and are now in line with the national average. Results in textile technology were in line with the national average in 2000, the first year candidates had been entered. The combined business technology results were considerably better in the short course in business studies than in resistant materials. Graphics results for both full and short courses were above average.
136. Achievement in lessons is good. The quality of graphics, particularly in Year 11, is very high. The majority of pupils have developed good presentation skills and continually evaluate and modify their ideas. One group is predicted to achieve 100 per cent A* to C grades, with several potential A* grades. Pupils have a good understanding and the ability to construct electronic circuits for games and use a CD-ROM effectively for revision purposes. Work in designing and making in resistant material groups indicates good development of practical skills and the ability to select and create workable ideas. Pupils taking food and textiles develop a good understanding of the properties of food and fabrics, and in food lessons plan and modify recipes to increase the nutritional properties of dishes. Basic skills in food and textiles are not as well developed because of pupils' fewer experiences in Years 7 to 9. Lower attainers and pupils with special educational needs make good progress, particularly in developing and making their design ideas.
137. Standards of work produced by students at the end of post 16 education are good. For the past six years, students taking A-level design and technology have had a 100 per cent pass rate. The prediction for 2001 for eight students is that all should gain A to E grades, with approximately half gaining A and B grades. A student with special educational needs is making good progress and should achieve a creditable grade. Students are required to identify a problem and develop a solution, for example, the need to have an emergency ladder in the case of fire at home, and a garden tool which is multi-purpose and designed to save time and energy. The emergency ladder project is to be submitted to the Young Engineer of the Year competition. The popularity of the subject has grown and 24 students are currently taking product design at AS level. The standard of work seen during the inspection is good. Students are analysing designs of chairs and are developing and modelling their own ideas to suit a particular need. The quality of their graphic skills is high and most students in Year 12 and 13 are on target to complete work by the deadline dates.
138. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are good and often very good from Years 7 to 13. In Year 7, pupils are very enthusiastic and keen to learn and are especially motivated when involved in the practical activities. Year 9 pupils are equally positive and participate in discussions on the development of their ideas for projects. Pupils taking

examination courses listen attentively in lessons and most are fully committed to producing coursework on time. Several pupils attend lunchtime and after-school clubs in order to complete folder and practical work. There is an obvious appreciation of the support given to them by their teachers and a willingness to share ideas. The commitment of students in Years 12 and 13 is high, with Year 12 students regularly attending a lesson time-tabled out of school time. Very good motivation is evident from the coursework of Year 13 students. Pupils and students are friendly and courteous and enjoy their experiences in design and technology.

139. The quality of teaching for the school as a whole is good and pupils' learning matches this. Over a third of lessons had teaching which was very good: this represents a great improvement from the previous inspection in 1996. One lesson was unsatisfactory because of the lack of planning and management of the group, with a poor appreciation of the health and safety risks of pupils using electrical equipment in their first practical lesson. The greatest strength of teaching is the high expectations and the teachers' subject knowledge, which is particularly evident in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Teaching is good in Years 10 and 11 and very good in the sixth form. Monitoring, marking and assessment of pupils' progress is given a high priority. Most teachers inspire and motivate pupils by showing very good personal skills and using fine exemplar materials. Visits to exhibitions and museums, entering work for Young Engineer competitions and making maximum use of the display areas, all contribute to the high standard of work produced by pupils. Unsatisfactory accommodation, resulting in at least 30 lessons per week being taught outside the specialist areas, has not deterred the determination of staff to improve standards. During the inspection, two members of the department were absent, but good supply staff and ICT support helped the pupils to maintain their high standards of work, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Relationships between pupils and teachers are nearly always very good. Lessons are well structured, resources used effectively and objectives are shared with the pupils. In some classes, the lack of planned differentiation and appropriate support material for the lower attainers can have a detrimental affect on pupils' progress, particularly in Years 7 to 9. Here, teaching is satisfactory rather than good or better – as seen elsewhere in the school. The development of technical terminology is encouraged through discussion and demonstration, but there is a lack of the widespread use of word banks, which would help to reinforce learning. Numeracy skills are particularly well developed by the need to measure accurately. ICT skills are used frequently when word-processing project work and graphical images are regularly used in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form.
140. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. There is only one food room, one textile room, a small electronics and graphics room and two areas to teach resistant materials. A Year 10 resistant materials group was not timetabled in any of the specialist rooms for any lesson last year. Poor accommodation has a detrimental affect on curricular provision. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 do not receive a balanced experience in all the different material areas, and some have limited experiences, particularly in food and textiles, because of the lack of specialist teachers and accommodation. Pupils selecting a design and technology course in Year 10 are therefore limited in their choice. Some pupils take the art and design option, which means that they do not cover the systems and control elements of the design and technology programme of study. The hardware for ICT is used well, but is limited in quantity, with pupils relying heavily on using computers at home. Resources are used effectively, though some large machines are rarely used. There is a general lack of computerised equipment in all material areas.
141. The improvement in the department since the previous inspection has been good, due to good management and a team effort by most of the department. Standards of work, teaching and progress have improved greatly. Schemes of work have been evaluated and modified regularly and re-planned to teach basic skills and give more opportunities

for creative development. Good, detailed assessment procedures are in place and are used to monitor progress, though there has been some over-estimation of the levels achieved by lower attainers at the age of 14. Accommodation is still unsatisfactory, though plans are currently being developed to upgrade the area. Great efforts have been made to enhance the environment through quality displays. The two technicians work hard to keep the design and technology areas well resourced and in good working order in the limited time allocated.

GEOGRAPHY

142. At the age of 14, pupils' standards are average. Teachers' assessments in Year 9 show that the percentage of pupils achieving Level 5 and above is slightly above average, but in work seen during the inspection, standards match those normally seen. At the age of 16, results are broadly average. In 2000, 62 per cent of pupils attained grades A* to C, compared with a national average of 54 per cent. However, results at grades A* to G were below average. The points score for GCSE results matches the national average. Boys' results in 2000 were above average, but the gap between the attainment of boys and that of girls is much lower than the national pattern. Since 1997, there has been some improvement in GCSE results. Sixth form standards are average, and in 2000, the points score was similar to the national average. Given the fact that the school's results in core subjects for 14 year olds are above average and overall GCSE results are also above average, standards reached in geography do not compare well with general performance in the school and are not as high as they should be.
143. By the age of 14, pupils can use atlases and textbooks to obtain information. They know about tectonic plates and can describe some of the effects of plate movement. They are aware that geographical issues often involve different opinions and conflicts of interest. Many pupils have difficulty locating and naming places on maps. Their knowledge of key world features is very limited. Equally, many have difficulty understanding and using Ordnance Survey maps. By the age of 16, pupils can describe urban areas and explain the development of particular land use patterns. Year 10 pupils know about farming types and can use a systems approach to compare farms. In the sixth form, students have a good understanding of the processes that create river valleys and can explain many of the features of river channels. Most have a good understanding of enquiry techniques and propose hypotheses, collect data and evaluate their work.
144. The achievement of pupils is satisfactory. Year 7 pupils have limited experiences of geography when they arrive in the school. They make satisfactory progress as they gain new knowledge and learn basic skills. Their progress is restricted because learning is not consolidated and pupils' long-term recall is limited. They develop their ideas and are able to describe places but they are less confident when required to give explanations or present points of view. Year 9 pupils produce good coursework based on their visit to the River Irk, and this exercise helps them to develop their organisational skills and extends their geographical awareness. By the time they are 16, pupils have developed their ability to carry out small enquiries with the guidance of their teachers. They begin to use their intellectual and creative skills. For example, a lesson on farming in Year 10 made use of their imagination, experience and creative skills. In the sixth form, students make satisfactory progress and the majority successfully makes the transition to the demands of the A-level syllabus. They extend their study skills and learn to synthesise material and become more analytical. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress because of the care and attention of class teachers. However, there is little in-class support. Where this is available, for example the support offered to a pupil in Year 7, pupils make good progress in developing their vocabulary to describe weather conditions.

145. The attitude and behaviour of pupils are good. The majority listen attentively and follow instructions well. Year 7 pupils, in particular, show their interest and enthusiasm for the work. In the majority of cases, pupils arrive on time and are well prepared for their lessons. In a small minority of cases, some pupils find it difficult to concentrate and fail to develop good work habits. This is particularly the case in some Year 9 classes, where pupils talk constantly, fail to take their work seriously, and are reluctant to listen to the teacher. Sixth form students are mature and sensible and take an interest in their work. However, they are too dependent on teachers for the pace and direction of lessons and need to take a more positive part in their learning.
146. Teaching is satisfactory and in some individual lessons is good. Where teaching is good, the teacher breaks away from textbook materials, engages the pupils in oral work and extends their thinking skills. A Year 10 lesson on agriculture, using material from the 'Thinking in Geography' project, was an example of good practice. Work on coal mining in Year 7 was also interesting, challenging and made demands on all pupils. Where teaching is unsatisfactory, it fails to stimulate, and pupils are restless and disruptive. There is no consistent approach to teaching in the department. Sometimes lessons have clear and realistic objectives that are explained to pupils, but in too many cases this does not happen, and pupils are not clear about the aim of the lesson. The lack of clarity means that teachers are unable to check learning at the end of the lesson and are unsure of the progress made. The department teaches mixed-ability groups, but has not adopted appropriate teaching styles. Whole-class teaching is the norm and this fails to extend the highest attainers. Pupils' work is marked regularly, but the marking is not always helpful. In some cases, inaccurate work has been marked as being correct, and although the teachers' comments provide encouragement and support, they rarely show pupils what their standard of attainment is, or how they could improve. In Years 7 to 9, marking is too rarely related to National Curriculum levels. There is regular testing, but the assessment data is not used to set targets for pupils or to evaluate the progress made. Pupils are not aware of how their work is assessed and do not understand the system of National Curriculum levels. Overall, pupils' learning is satisfactory across all year groups in the school, but there is scope for more rapid learning.
147. The management of the department is satisfactory, but in view of the overall standards and the underachievement of some pupils, procedures for monitoring and improving the department are not effective enough and do not ensure a consistent approach by all teachers. There are clear objectives for the department, but these are not always evident in planning and teaching. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory and GCSE results have improved steadily. There is a need for further planning of better quality units of work and model unit plans could be used to good effect. In addition, teachers need to have a more consistent approach to lesson planning with the development of clear learning objectives for each lesson and an evaluation towards the end of the lesson. Lessons need to contain more challenge and pupils should be moved from lower level activities, such as copying and colouring, onto tasks that will develop their thinking skills. The department needs to follow best practice in other areas of the school and make better use of assessment data to help pupils to be more aware of their attainment and to raise their expectations.

HISTORY

148. Results at age 14 are in line with those found nationally. In classes observed during the inspection, pupils attained standards that match national norms. In such classes, pupils handle historical facts well and they increase their understanding of both chronology and causation. For example, Year 9 pupils, in their study of poverty at the turn of the last century, can show effectively that poverty was dynamic and that families

fell into and out of poverty depending on such matters as children reaching the age where they could acquire work.

149. At age 16, results in GCSE examinations are broadly average. However, standards of work in Year 11 lessons are above average. In these lessons, pupils are skilful at linking several facts together to make a comprehensive and cohesive historical picture. For example, Year 11 pupils, in their study of Germany immediately after the end of the First World War, can link facts such as the demoralisation of the army and rampant inflation to show how the diversity of the problems facing the German government precluded early and simple solutions.
150. Sixth form results in A-level examinations match national averages. However, the standard of students' work in their notebooks and in lessons seen during the inspection are above average. Students have a better than average grasp of the complexities of historical analysis. For example, Year 13 students can evaluate the strengths of Hitler and the Nazis and the weaknesses of the other parties in determining the reasons for Hitler's rise to power in 1933.
151. Achievement in the first three years is satisfactory. Pupils learn to tease out historical information from a wide range of sources. A particularly good feature of progress at this stage is that pupils, who come to the school at Year 7 with a diversity of historical skills and knowledge, achieve a uniformly good knowledge of the periods they are studying, and they are able to relate causation to effect. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 build effectively on the progress made in the first three years. In Years 10 and 11, learning through empathy is a strength of the subject. A Year 10 class, for example, was clearly moved by the accounts of the suffering of Jewish people in Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1938. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress in Years 7 to 11. However, pupils' individual education programmes could be used more effectively as planning tools. Gifted and talented pupils make satisfactory progress, but could be stretched even further. In the sixth form, progress is particularly good in the students' abilities to evaluate historical sources and extrapolate from them. For example, Year 12 students studying sources in late nineteenth century Irish history, such as those which document the struggle between the parliamentary and the military-activist wings of the national movement, can discern threads of history which reach out to the present day.
152. Teaching of history is good throughout the school. During the inspection, no unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject. Lessons are planned and prepared well and lead to pupils' good learning. A characteristic of history teaching is that the teachers' belief in the value of the subject is reflected in their enthusiasm for it. This is infectious and has a strong impact on pupils' learning. Teachers are particularly adept at establishing good relationships, often using humour whilst always maintaining control of classes. They are particularly skilled at drawing out significant points from material which is both challenging and exciting. The quality of teaching leads to pupils' good learning in Years 11 to 13, since pupils are stimulated by the challenge and apply their best intellectual and creative efforts to fulfil the tasks set. Teachers use homework well and it is, for the most part, marked consistently and is used successfully, not only to finish work from the current lesson, but also to prepare for the next. The quality of teaching across Years 11 to 13 makes a very positive impact on pupils' learning, attainment and rate of progress. In Years 7 to 9 learning is satisfactory as pupils have yet to acquire the skills for rapid assimilation of knowledge.
153. The response of pupils is good. With the exception of a small, but significant, group of pupils of very low attainers, pupils generally show application to their work. They respond diligently, settle quickly and sustain concentration. Their positive behaviour and

response, which are often a direct result of good teaching and good management of the classroom, are important factors.

154. The department is very effectively and efficiently led by the head of department, who is an excellent role model for the team, which offers good support and is committed to raising standards. Pupils are encouraged towards high achievement. The head of department monitors colleagues' work, both inside and outside the classroom. There are informed and informative policies which are being implemented with success and which have a positive impact upon pupils' learning. The head of department has introduced a comprehensive assessment policy, based on sound principles and achievable outcomes. Targets are predicted for pupils against National Curriculum criteria and these have a positive impact on the guidance of pupils' learning and attainment. The curricular provision is of good quality, although schemes of work for the new Curriculum 2000 are not yet fully complete. Teaching rooms have displays of pupils' work which create an atmosphere conducive to learning.
155. Insufficient use is made of ICT to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. Good use is made of visits to supplement pupils' learning. These range from visits as diverse as Eden camp, in Year 9, and Dublin, in Year 13. The school sensibly uses the rich sources concerning the industrial revolution, which are in very close proximity.
156. This is a lively department which has many strengths and which has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection report, which was very positive. Although there has been a slight decline in GCSE examinations results, A-level results continue to be strong and teaching is better than that recorded in the previous inspection report.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

157. At the age of 14, pupils' standards in ICT are above the national average. In the most recent Year 9 teachers' assessments, 89 per cent of pupils attained Level 5 and above, which is 30 per cent above that attained by pupils nationally. In work seen during the inspection, in lessons and in pupils' work files, teachers' assessments match the levels awarded on most, but not on all, aspects of the subject.
158. By the end of Year 9, pupils have high-level skills in word processing, desktop publishing and the use of spreadsheets. They understand about letter writing, handling data and calculations. They are adept at using a variety of programs, including animations, whereby they construct moving slide sequences that create good visual impact and presentation. Pupils make their own pictures on screen and know about inserting graphics taken from clip-art files into their texts. They can access information from the Internet and all have unique e-mail addresses, although few are using them as yet. Most pupils are relatively unskilled in robot programming and screen control, and few of them know much about digital cameras and scanners.
159. At the age of 16, standards in ICT are above the national average. Over the past four years, results in the subject have always been above the national average, and sometimes well above it. In the most recent GCSE examinations, the percentage of pupils gaining grades A* to C was well above the national average. Most pupils usually get at least a G grade, and results in the subject are often the best that pupils gain across all subject areas. Girls' grades are consistently higher than boys' grades. Results at this school compare favourably with those of similar schools. In work seen during the inspection, pupils' portfolios are full and well organised. Their annotations and explanations are extremely detailed, and show that they understand what they are doing. This practice ensures that they make progress when aspects are revisited and helps them to revise more effectively for examinations. Work on databases and spreadsheets is strong. Pupils are adept at manipulating data, creating formulae for

calculations and presenting their work in different formats for various audiences. They undertake detailed research and investigation before analysing business problems and devising and testing possible solutions. They pay good attention to screen placement and use of colour for maximum impact.

160. At the end of sixth form education, standards in the subject are well above average. Results at A-level are consistently high and show an upward trend. In the past three years, all students passed the examination, with grades A to C far exceeding the Ds and Es. More boys than girls have taken the subject at A-level, but there are now more girls in the Year 12 groups than in previous years. Students have extensive knowledge of computers, software, applications, systems and the effect which ICT has on society. They use sound logic when selecting suitable programs to present arguments and related data. They research deeply and conduct extensive surveys of existing systems before making suggestions for improvements and devising new ones to achieve better or faster results. They understand the needs of users and the value of prototypes, can write technical guides and user manuals and evaluate the success of their systems. Students in Year 13 are creating systems to help other departments in the school. For example, they have redesigned the borrowing, returning and filing systems in the library, the Year 7 and 8 database, team organisation in physical education and record-keeping for the careers department. Although practical skills are at a high level for all students, a few are less confident and occasionally have difficulty with theory in the highly technical aspects.
161. For the pupils who have discrete lessons, progress is good in Years 7 to 11 and very good in the sixth form. Pupils begin work in Year 7 with varying levels of competence, but most of them knew about accessing programs, finding instructions and menus, using keyboards and controlling the mouse, before entering this school. Many pupils used computers for writing, drawing, doing mathematics, moving robots and playing adventure games. At the start of Year 7, all pupils make good progress in understanding about passwords, logging on to the network and saving and retrieving their own work. The higher-attaining pupils make the most rapid progress in using computers as they grasp the principles quickly, retain the knowledge better, and complete more and better homework. Lower-attaining pupils, including those with special educational needs, make good progress in practical work as they have time to practise and refine their work, but as their levels of literacy are limited, they struggle with theory. Pupils of like ability are often paired so that a more confident or capable pupil does not dominate the activity, make all the decisions and cause a lower-attaining pupil to feel inadequate. The very highest attainers have extra, demanding tasks to complete after the basic work is finished, which ensures that they are suitably challenged.
162. Pupils have very good attitudes to the subject. They enter the rooms cheerfully and appear keen to get to work. They like watching demonstrations and most are keen to communicate their observations to others. In most lessons, pupils have to share computers, but they get on very well together, make joint decisions and share the tasks. Many of them help others willingly and show appreciation of individuals' efforts. Most settle to work speedily, keep busy and persevere, even when they encounter difficulties. Younger pupils are especially keen to have their work appraised during lessons, and are proud to show what they can do. Behaviour is very good, as pupils know the rules and understand that they are expected to work and try hard during lessons. A few pupils forget to do their homework, but they all know why it has to be completed. Pupils check their own performance sheets in order to gain better marks. Many pupils and students, especially those taking external examinations, act sensibly on the teachers' advice, showing maturity and responsibility. Students in the sixth form are confident and diligent and their behaviour is exemplary.

163. The qualities of teaching and learning are good throughout the school. In the 14 lessons seen during the inspection, none was graded as less than satisfactory, six were good, five were very good and one was excellent. Teaching is best in the upper years in school, where the subject specialists take all the groups. This is a very successful department, mainly because the teachers have extensive subject knowledge that ensures that pupils are taught up-to-date skills and given correct information. Teachers work hard for the pupils whom they expect to respond accordingly and to attain high standards.
164. Teachers give good demonstrations, showing pupils exactly what they should see on screen, and they explain how they can solve problems by using logical strategies. Planning is good. Modules of work are thoughtfully written to interest and motivate the pupils; for example, projects about a canal boat company and about a leisure centre are challenging pupils in Years 7 and 10. Lessons usually proceed as they are planned, with clear introductions and instructions, time for pupils to do their own work, and short sessions at the end to issue homework and strengthen the understanding. Course booklets are devised so that pupils can work out for themselves the next steps, but also allow the higher-attaining pupils to use their own strategies for creativity. During lessons, teachers ensure that they see all pupils' work on screen and in books, which keeps pupils moving on. Marking is very good in the upper school, as teachers write detailed comments to tell pupils how they can improve, but is less thorough in the lower school, as sometimes the marking is by ticks and congratulatory comments only. There is inconsistency in the assessment of pupils' work at the end of Year 9, as the system in place does not work well in practice. As pupils' behaviour is usually very good, teachers have no difficulty with discipline. It is clear that they enjoy being with young people. They treat them fairly and insert humour into some lessons, which pupils appreciate.
165. Pupils who do not take ICT as an option subject in Year 10 and beyond are in danger of not receiving their entitlement in the subject, as some departments use the computers irregularly. Most subject teachers have enrolled on the new training courses for ICT, but this has yet to take full effect in the classroom. Some departments, however, already make good use of ICT. In mathematics, pupils use a program to draw shapes and repeating patterns. In science, they use data-logging equipment to monitor changes in temperature and humidity over time in controlled environments. In art, they use programs for research and also to create images and distortions. In physical education, they record health-related fitness data, and in modern languages they use the Internet to contact other schools in Europe. Departments such as design and technology, business education, music, geography and history use computers for presenting work in desktop publishing format, for composition and for recording visits on camera. Other departments do not use their equipment often enough and miss opportunities to allow pupils to show their skills.
166. Leadership is very strong. The head of the department is well respected and teachers in the department work well as a team. The development plan is well written and the aims are realisable. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. Two new teachers have been appointed, and the quality of teaching has improved. A new scheme of work includes all the necessary aspects, with the exception of control, which is to be introduced in September. Results in GCSE and A-level are rising steadily. There are three new rooms and many new computers, linked by fibre-optic cables that allow pupils to access programs and the Internet quickly. The school website is excellent and is nationally recognised. Technical help has improved and staff and pupils have good support in lessons. In order to make further improvements, more computers are needed to reduce the amount of sharing and to allow more teachers to use the equipment on a regular basis. One large screen is needed in each room to enable pupils to see the demonstrations clearly. A network

manager is essential to release teachers from trouble-shooting tasks. Assessments at the end of Year 9 need standardising and the arrangements for cross-curricular ICT need attention.

MODERN LANGUAGES

167. Provision for languages is very good and better than in most schools. On entry to the school, pupils have a choice of one of three languages. In Year 9, all pupils take a second language. At the end of the year, they gain a certificate, which is awarded by the school for their achievement in this second language. In Years 10 and 11, all pupils continue with one language, and a small number study two. All three languages are offered in the sixth form; the comparatively high number of students in Year 12 on AS courses is encouraging.
168. Observation of the work in lessons and a scrutiny of pupils' exercise books show that standards at the age of 14 in all languages are satisfactory. In the mixed-ability groups at this stage, the middle and lower-attaining pupils develop their speaking and listening skills well. They mostly write carefully and accurately, and, by Year 9, they can write short accounts about themselves, their school and home. The higher attainers write with greater accuracy, but they do not have enough scope to write at length and about the past at an early enough stage. These pupils are mostly confident in their speaking and listening skills and show good recall of vocabulary in their reading. Teachers' assessments of Year 9 pupils in 2000 indicated that attainment was in line with standards expected nationally.
169. In 2000, GCSE results in French and German at grades A* to C were well above average. This represents good progress. Results in Spanish, for a small group of mainly average and low attainers, were slightly below average but this represents good progress. Pupils generally performed better in languages than in most of the other subjects they took. The difference between the performance of boys and girls was wider than is shown by the national picture. Results in French over the past three years have risen slightly. In German and Spanish, they have fluctuated according to the nature of the group, but they have been consistently well above average. Similar, good standards are found in current Year 11 classwork. Higher attainers make very good progress in their writing and produce accurate and interestingly written descriptions of, for example, the holidays they have taken in previous years and their plans for the future. These pupils take full advantage of the closely structured support given by their teachers to develop speaking skills. Middle and lower attainers are more hesitant in talking about themselves in the foreign language and require more support and experience of listening to tapes, but most achieve well in the written tasks they do.
170. In the sixth form, results are broadly average in all three of the languages offered at A-level. Similar standards were found in the work seen during the inspection. The most talented students express their views and opinions well, both in spoken and written form, but most lack confidence in both speaking and listening skills. For example, in a Year 13 German lesson, students needed, and were well provided with, much excellent support material to enable them to understand and talk about the effects of global warming on the environment. Students make satisfactory progress. In 2000, out of the 13 students who took languages at A-level in French, German and Spanish, two students gained B grades and three gained C grades. All the others passed, except two. These A-level results, and the similar results over the past three years, cannot be compared with national averages, because of the low numbers involved in each language.

171. The achievement of pupils aged 14, including those with special educational needs, is satisfactory, but at the age of 16, it is good overall. Higher attainers at the age of 16 make very good progress in sets at this stage. Middle and lower attainers, including some of those with special educational needs, make good progress. A few lower-attaining pupils in Year 11 make only satisfactory progress, because their level of concentration and interest in languages is not high. However, in this year, another class of lower-attaining pupils made very good progress in a Spanish lesson, when pupils learnt about shops and shopping in Spain. Here, the good teaching was well adapted to the pupils' needs.
172. Pupils behave very well in all lessons, except for the few in Year 11 who make less effort than they should. Teachers manage their pupils very well and provide them with a good range of tasks that are well suited to their attainment. Because all pupils in the mixed-ability classes from Years 7 to 9 feel able to do the work expected of them, they develop good attitudes to the subject.
173. The quality of teaching is good. Two-thirds of the lessons seen were good or very good. One lesson was excellent, and the remainder were satisfactory. Teachers make great efforts to manage the mixed-ability groups in Years 7 to 9 well, so that all pupils can make progress. Teachers state the aim of the lesson clearly and provide a good range of activities, which are accessible to all pupils. In addition, they ensure good levels of interest and concentration among pupils by maintaining a good pace of teaching and often using the overhead projector very well. Teachers at this stage, though, do not always give enough extra work to challenge the higher attainers fully. In Years 10 and 11, teachers have a good understanding of the demands of the examinations, and provide their higher-attaining pupils with enough appropriate materials to stretch their attainment. Teachers have high expectations of their pupils at all levels of attainment and give good support to pupils with special educational needs. They generally mark pupils' work conscientiously, but they do not require pupils to do follow-up corrections. Learning is good in Years 7 to 11. Some sixth form students are less productive in language lessons than for the sixth form as a whole and learning here is satisfactory rather than good.
174. The acting head of department leads the department well, taking full advantage of well-established management procedures and organisation. The department is aware of its strengths and the areas where further development is needed, which include ICT and some revision of schemes of work. The department has considered, with success, how to provide a good language-learning environment on both sites, despite the inherent difficulties of working on two sites.
175. Since the last inspection both the GCSE results and the quality of teaching have improved.

MUSIC

176. Standards are above those normally seen. By the age of 14, the attainment of the substantial majority of the pupils is above the nationally expected level and progress is good. By the age of 16, standards of attainment are above the national expectation and the great majority of the pupils, including those with special educational needs, make very good progress in relation to their prior learning. At the end of the sixth form, the students' results are above average and standards seen during the inspection were also above average. Students achieve well in relation to their prior learning. Pupils in Year 7 have a good understanding of tempo and effectively sang 'One of Those Songs' in a variety of tempos. Year 8 pupils have a good understanding of musical texture and performed Pachelbel's 'Canon' with well-developed skill on keyboards. Pupils in Year 9 matched chords and melody when playing 'Matador Magic' in a bossa nova style. A substantial majority of pupils has good theoretical knowledge, and performance skills are well developed. Higher-attaining pupils have highly developed instrumental skills, supported by a secure knowledge of theory. Lower-attaining pupils are unclear about staff notation and the elements of music.
177. In GCSE examinations in 2000, all of the 12 entries achieved between grades A* to D, and 92 per cent achieved A* to C. These results are well above the national average. Since the previous inspection, excellent results in GCSE have been maintained. In the Associated Board of the Royal School of Music instrumental and voice examinations in 2000, from ten pupils of different ages entered, one achieved a distinction, three achieved merits and six had pass grades. The one candidate entered for A-level gained grade C. Pupils in Year 10 understand and recognise vocal ranges, textures and styles of singing. They demonstrated good listening skills when describing aspects of the song 'Brightly Dawns Our Wedding Day'. There are good opportunities for independent learning and the use of ICT as pupils compose their own rounds. Pupils in Year 11 listen to musical extracts and describe what they hear in language appropriate for answering examination questions. Year 12 students are able to annotate such musical scores as 'Sarabande and Gigue' by J.S. Bach and 'Sonata in B flat' by Mozart. Students in Year 13 are familiar with the periods of musical history and the outstanding composers of those times. Higher-attaining pupils have well-developed performance skills and effectively appraise their own and each other's performances. Lower-attaining pupils are able performers and have a satisfactory understanding of music theory. The pupils make very good progress over time in their ability to listen to a wide range of musical extracts and to compose and perform a melody above a figured bass. They develop arguments for and against playing the Bach 'Sarabande and Gigue' on the harpsichord rather than the piano. This, together with extended essays on the periods of musical history, makes an important contribution to the development of literacy skills. There is little contribution to numeracy development, the emphasis being placed upon performance.
178. Pupils have a very good attitude towards music, and they enjoy lessons. They are very well behaved and senior pupils are committed to obtaining good examination results. They collaborate effectively, particularly in composition and performance work. Relationships between pupils and with their teachers are mature and productive. They handle the expensive resources and instruments they use with care. They show respect for their own and each other's contributions and performances
179. The quality of teaching, including instrumental tuition, is good. Pupils' learning is also good across the school. The three staff and nine visiting instrumentalist and vocalist teachers are accomplished musicians with a very secure knowledge of the subject. They successfully impart much of their enthusiasm to the pupils, who show good interest and concentration. Lessons are well prepared, with clear teaching objectives and expected learning outcomes being clearly identified. This enables pupils to

approach their work with confidence and make good progress in lessons. More care should be taken to match the levels of work to the needs and abilities of individuals or groups of pupils, particularly in Years 7 to 9. Assessment procedures are good and have been written into the scheme of work, and the pupils' work is effectively assessed as the lesson proceeds. Assessment should be used to inform future curricular planning. The quality of teaching makes a significant contribution to the provision for pupils' spiritual development when they listen to good quality music. Opportunities for musical contributions to assemblies are being missed. Social and cultural development are good; pupils have a good understanding of African and Latin American music. Teaching is most effective when lesson objectives are displayed and explained to pupils at the start of lessons. Teaching is less effective when aspects of the lesson are not delivered within a time frame.

180. The local authority music service provides good support for the school. One hundred and sixty pupils benefit from instrumental and vocal tuition. More than 100 are involved in such extra-curricular activities as string and brass ensembles, swing and concert bands and senior and junior choirs. Christmas concerts and such shows as 'Sounds of America' and 'Joseph and His Technicolour Dreamcoat' receive good parental support. The lower school accommodation is satisfactory and has a new practice room. The upper school teaching room and practice rooms are excellent and provide a bright, stimulating and welcoming environment. The department is well managed and enthusiastically led, and standards are carefully monitored. Since the last inspection standards have improved, largely as a result of the quality of teaching. The quality of singing is satisfactory and should continue to improve. ICT provision has also been improved. The scheme of work should reflect more closely the programmes of study of the National Curriculum.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

181. Results in GCSE examinations in 2000 were below the national average, despite recent improvements. The reasons for this were attributed to the particular cohort. Since the last inspection, GCSE results have steadily improved and are on course to resume this improvement in the current year.
182. Standards of work are above average by the age of 14. Levels of skill are relatively low when pupils enter the school, but good teaching ensures that they improve throughout their time in school. Throwing and catching skills are well developed and are effectively put into practice during competitive netball and basketball games. In volleyball, good dig, set and serving techniques are reflected in the high level of competence pupils' display during lessons and during extra-curricular activities. When engaged in health-related fitness classes, they are able to carry out a full range of strength and mobility exercises. All pupils are aware of the necessity for warming up.
183. By the age of 16, pupils achieve good standards in their chosen options. They have a mature approach to rugby, and demonstrate good skills of handling, tackling and support play. Aerobic exercises are carried out with humour and maturity with pupils prepared to persevere. Those taking GCSE are knowledgeable about human anatomy, the function of muscles and joints and their relation to sports injuries, their treatment and prevention. There is no timetabled physical education for sixth form students, but opportunities are provided for them to undertake a range of physical activities during the lunch break: and many take up this offer and perform at a high standard. Some also assist younger pupils during lessons.
184. The majority of pupils enjoy physical education, and it features highly in their subject preferences. This is largely due to the very good relationships they have with their

teachers and the fact that teachers make learning fun. This positive attitude is often reflected in the way pupils take the trouble to look smart and be appropriately dressed for their activities. Pupils not only respond well to teachers, but are also very supportive of each other, working well in pairs and groups. Most are very well behaved, and only a very small minority detract from this standard. They achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and those participating in sixth form activities achieve very well.

185. Almost all teaching is good. This has a very positive impact on pupils' learning, which is good across the school. Management of the class is a very strong feature of all lessons, with teachers able to establish good working relationships with pupils. There is a tendency for pupils to be over-directed, but this is improving, and there are more opportunities for pupils to plan their own work. Team teaching is very successful, due to the fact that members of the department have been together for some years and are familiar with each other's style of teaching. This, together with the fact that all have very secure specialist knowledge of their subject area, enables them to challenge pupils appropriately, while offering a high level of support. All pupils are well catered for, although planning does not always clearly identify what arrangements are to be made for pupils with special educational needs. Excellent leadership of this successful department has ensured that the quality of provision makes it a strength of the school.
186. Very good accommodation and resources ensure that pupils have a wide range of experiences, though relatively newly acquired tennis and netball courts are incomplete. A good range of extra-curricular provision, to which all staff contribute, complements a varied programme of activities for all age groups. The school continues to enjoy considerable success with individuals and teams at local, national and international level.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

187. Pupils across the age range attain standards expected by the locally agreed guidelines. This broadly matches the findings of the last inspection. Pupils make good progress, including those who have special educational needs. The first group of Year 11 pupils will take the GCSE short course this summer, so no national comparisons can be made yet. The trend in A-level results over the last two years is one of improvement, with over 75 per cent of those entered gaining A to E grades in 2000, though the sample is too small to make national comparisons.
188. By the time they are 14, pupils know many of the basic facts about world religions. For example, Year 8 are discovering the origins of Sikhism, and they know where it began and how Guru Nanak founded the faith. They are beginning to understand some of its symbolism, such as the unbroken circle, worn as a bangle by some Sikhs, representing the unending nature of God. Pupils know some biblical stories, as seen in the work Year 9 have done about parables and stories with hidden meanings, such as the story about the lost son. One Year 9 class used very effective role-play when learning about the Good Samaritan.
189. By the age of 16, pupils have a better understanding of some of life's deeper issues, such as euthanasia or abortion. As they study these, they discover what several world religions teach about the sanctity and quality of life. They consider personal identity, worshipping communities and some of their practices, such as baptism. They examine some of the traditional arguments for the existence of God, animal rights and the Christian ideas about the stewardship of the earth. In a social context, they study marriage and divorce, and have considered the latest deliberations about re-marriage of divorcees.

190. Sixth form students studying the A-level course reach broadly average standards in examinations and in the work seen during the inspection. They know and understand the origins and beliefs of Buddhism, and they study topics such as science and religion, or creation and Darwin's theories. They examine and research such questions as 'Will science have an explanation for everything one day?' They study some of the ideas of philosophers, such as Hume and Lamarck, and they place emphasis on the social and psychological factors involved. Those who do not follow the A-level course take part in day-long conferences which have visiting speakers, such as a member of the cathedral staff, or leaders of other faiths from the locality.
191. Across Years 7 to 11 teaching and learning are good, with some lessons that are very good. It was not possible to observe teaching in the sixth form to make a reliable judgement on its quality. Across the rest of the school teachers offer high levels of challenge, and lessons move at a good pace, keeping pupils' interest throughout. Teachers provide work that is suitable for pupils who have special educational needs, often producing special booklets and worksheets more suited to their needs. The methods used match the needs of all the pupils well, and encourage good learning. For example, research, role-play, video and audio tapes are all used to good effect. Teachers are confident in their knowledge and understanding of the subject, and they deal effectively with pupils' questions, developing their understanding well. They make many of their own worksheets and have produced booklets about the various world religions. Homework is used well to extend learning, and it is checked and marked efficiently so that pupils know how well they are doing, and how they might improve. This also leads pupils to take some responsibility for their own work.
192. Pupils enjoy religious education, and because of the teachers' methods, challenge and pace, they sustain their interest well and put effort into their work. Behaviour is generally good and they display positive attitudes. Relationships are good between teachers and pupils, and there is a good working atmosphere in lessons. Pupils are willing to join in discussions, and to research, write and report. They offer their own opinions and views, and teachers remind them that they should respect what others have to say, or what they may believe.
193. Leadership of the subject is very good, and the head of the department, after only 18 months, has produced good documents and schemes of work. There is good support for staff who are not specialists in the subject. The curriculum is broad and well balanced and follows the local authority's guidelines well. There is insufficient use of computers, and higher attainers are not always stretched to their capacity. However, the department is aware of both of these points and has plans to address them. Assessment is very good and teachers are able to track pupils' progress. Pupils themselves have a full part to play in the assessment process, and they are well informed about how well they are doing or what they must do to improve. Targets are set and these are reviewed regularly. Resources are good and used well to enhance pupils' learning.
194. There has been good improvement since the last inspection, especially in assessment and its use, leadership and management of the department, and the time allocated to religious education, which now fulfils legal requirements.
195. The department has good standing in the school, and ranks alongside other subjects well. This is due to the hard work of the head of department and the team of teachers, who are all very committed to good standards.